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Yuri Trifonov

STUDENTS

A Novel

Ю Р И Й Т Р И Ф О Н О В

СТУДЕНТЫ

Р О М А Н

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва 1913

Y U R I T R I F O N O V

STUDENTS

A N O V E L



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Author's Preface

I was born in Moscow, and with Moscow is associated every major event in my life, every experience that has contributed to the formation of my character. Here it was that I went to school, earned my first money, received a higher education, and began to write.

Moscow can hardly be called a town. Leningrad is a town, as are Kiev and Rostov-on-Don; there are many large and beautiful towns in the Soviet Land. But Moscow is a whole world, a complex world, astounding for the multiplicity and unexpectedness of the events taking place within it; a world supported by the labour of millions of people who belong to a race at once ancient and eternally young; a world in which essential, progressive, daring ventures are initiated, take root, and flower, filling the air with a fragrance one cannot get enough of, no matter how long one lives here.

I attended a school on the banks of the Moscow River. My chums and I spent hours watching jovial workmen clothe these banks in marble. Before our wondering eyes, district after district was completely changed. Today we would see scaffolding go up; tomorrow a many-storeyed building would rise behind it. Stadiums, squares, parks, and boulevards put in their appearance; palatial Metro stations, each one more beautiful than the last, were opened under the surface of the earth.

The "gang" of inquisitive youngsters to which I belonged had to see all these things with their own eyes. We went everywhere, climbed everywhere, examined everything. We even found time to visit museums, especially the Tretyakov Gallery, which was in our own neighbourhood. There we would spend breathless hours, unable to express in words the pleasure we experienced.

As I grew older and began to consider a choice of profession, I found myself lingering before the entrance to the Moscow University, which is the oldest in the country. Noisy groups of young men and women kept coming and going, and I would smile to myself as I watched them, anticipating the day when I too would be a university student. At that time my sixteenth birthday was approaching.

But the war broke out a year before I was to have graduated from school. Enemy planes appeared in a sky I had always found starry and cloudless. Now it became the scene of nightly air battles. Moscow was suddenly grim and silent and lampless. I came to hate those who had violated this sky, who had forced the doors of our school to close and the merry clamour of children's voices to be silenced. I joined a district fire brigade, thinking in this way to serve Moscow, which for me symbolized my country. This, then, became my first job.

In 1942 I began to work in a large aircraft plant as an unskilled labourer. By studying, I learned to become a fitter, later I was made a dispatcher, and then a tool technologist. It was while working in this plant that I joined the Komsomol. I was elected editor of the plant paper, a task I was only too glad to undertake. The love of literature I had known ever since I was a child, now seized me with renewed force. During my school days I had filled many notebooks with my own compositions, mostly serial adventure stories. I also wrote verse in the manner of Mayakovsky, and considered myself a poet rather than a prose writer.

In Moscow there is an educational institution which, I believe, is unique in the world. This is the Moscow Literary Institute, founded by the Union of Soviet Writers on the initiative of Maxim Gorky. The students of this Institute receive the same sort of general education as philological students at the Moscow University, but in addition they are offered seminars in the writing of prose, poetry, plays and criticism. During their summer holidays, they are sent to various places in the Soviet Union with the purpose of fulfilling specific literary assignments. In the few years of its existence, the Institute has graduated such outstanding writers as Vasili Azhayev, author of the novel *Far From Moscow*, Margarita Aligher, whose poem *Zoya* has become widely popular, Antonina Koptayeva, author of a number of novels, the latest of which is *Ivan Ivanovich*, and Konstantin Simonov, poet, novelist, and playwright, editor of *Litera-*

turnaya Gazeta and Assistant Secretary of the U.S.S.R. Union of Soviet Writers.

At this Institute, earnest and painstaking efforts are made to develop young literary talent. The seminars are headed by such eminent writers as Konstantin Fedin, Leonid Leonov, Konstantin Paustovsky and Fyodor Gladkov.

Once I had the audacity to send one of my poetry notebooks to the Institute, along with a letter asking to be accepted as a student. As a matter of precaution I included a short story on a war theme. Imagine my surprise on being informed that Konstantin Fedin had liked my story and I had been enrolled in the Prose Writing Department (my poetry was not even mentioned).

In this way I became a student of the Moscow Literary Institute, continuing at the same time to work at the aircraft plant. Throughout the five years of my study there I attended seminars held by Konstantin Fedin. After reading our writings to each other, we invariably engaged in vehement and engrossing argument. We discussed the most pressing problems of contemporary literature and made bold decisions on language, style, and message.

In the summer we were given the opportunity to travel to any spot in the country we chose, our trips being paid for by the Writers' Union. From Armenia and the Kuban I brought back with me a number of short stories which were submitted to friendly but merciless criticism. Two of them were published in 1947 and represented my first published works.

Soon I was in my fifth and last year at the Institute, and the time drew near when I must part with my fellow students and with the professors whose labours had made the acquiring of knowledge such a joy. As I glanced back over the path I had traversed, I was filled with the desire to affix it in my memory by writing a book about Soviet students.

I saw once more the whole life of our Institute, recalled talks and encounters which had taken place within its walls and the work we had done in collaboration with students from other institutes. It was Soviet student life, so dynamic, so crowded with interests, that I wished to record in my book. And Soviet young people, with their eyes fixed on the future. I saw before me all sorts of students, united by the one thing they had in common—their youth. And while the paths leading them to the Institute were diverse and their personalities varied, they were alike in that each was closely bound

up with the life about him; none of them lived in isolation. This is a fact typical of Soviet student life, and one which makes possible such character transformation as that I tried to show in the case of Sergei Palavin and Lena Medovskaya. While reviewing my own life as a student, I saw that it had not been all happiness, there had been painful moments as well. And I realized that I must write not only about people like Vadim Belov, a true son of the Soviet era and a typical "positive" character of our times, but about people like Sergei Palavin too, a "negative" type whose attitudes are a harmful hang-over from an earlier period. Fortunately such people are rarely to be met with among our students, but we are bound to remark them in order to remake them and take them with us into the bright future when communism will have been achieved.

The writing of this book took two years; I finished it in 1950. It was awarded a Stalin Prize.

Y. Trifonov

STUDENTS



Chapter 1

He went part of the way by bus the roomy new blue and-yellow trolley bus. There were no trolley buses like this in Moscow before the war. The comfortable seats were upholstered in stamped plush with leather trimming. The bus glided as smoothly as though floating on water. He had not seen a Moscow bus conductor for five years. For five long years he had had no occasion to use the brisk phrase "Getting off at the next stop?" And now, when he did, his voice sounded so loud, and so absurdly joyful, that all the passengers standing between himself and the exit—there weren't many at noon on a weekday—turned in surprise to look at him, and let him pass without a word.

The pleats of the pneumatic door gathered themselves up obligingly, and he jumped on to the pavement.

And now here he was—walking about the streets of Moscow!

The July sun was making the smooth asphalt on the road sticky. Close up it was quite blue, but further away

it gleamed in the sunshine as if coated with chalk. The buildings on his left cast short, chunky shadows, those on his right were bathed in sunshine, their windows ablaze, throwing liquid spots of light on to the shady side.

A thing like a gigantic blue beetle came round the corner, its watery wings extended. Each wing consisted of millions of drops, and shone with all the colours of the rainbow. As the chariot of rain crawled slowly on, it left behind it a wave of coolness, and the asphalt turned black and began to send up thin clouds of steam.

This was Moscow! He was back in Moscow at last!

Everything here was familiar, bound up with memories of childhood. Here was his home, that simple, human home of which soldiers at the front thought and spoke constantly, each of his own. . . . In the dead of night in the woods around Vienna, and high up in the wild hills of Khingan, he used to see in his mind's eye Zamoskvorechye, Yakimanka, the granite embankments, the old lime trees of Neskuchny Gardens.

And now he was back among it all, surrounded by everything that memory had guarded so jealously. There, in the old house at the corner of Spaso-Nalivkovsky, he had worked during the autumn of the first war year in the Youth Fire Brigade. Worked! A lad of sixteen. . . The signplate "Kindergarten No. 62" was back on the door of the old house now. The glossy leaves of an aspidistra were peeping out of an open window, and the sound of singing came from a radio set.

He walked faster and faster, till he was almost running

Now he was crossing the bridge over the canal. There were crowds of people on the pavement in front of the Udarnik Cinema, most of them very young, reminding him that the school holidays were in full swing.

The Moscow River was not yet in sight, but its fresh breath could be felt in the air, and he could picture it to

himself beyond that row of houses. He had lived there at one time, on the Bersenevskaya Embankment, and gone to school on the Sofiiskaya Embankment, just opposite the Kremlin. He used to walk under the arch of the bridge on his way to school; it was dark there, one's footsteps resounded hollowly, and one could always summon an echo. After school he and his friends used to "train their will" by walking along the stone parapet of the embankment, balancing themselves with outspread arms. A teacher caught them at it once, and there had been trouble for the whole class.

He came to a stop halfway across the powerful concrete arch. The Bolshoi Kamenny Bridge! The most beautiful bridge in the world! He had no doubts as to that any more, having seen the bridges of Prague and Vienna, and any amount of bridges in other countries.

The town looked cramped and irregular from here—you could not see the streets, just a mass of houses, a huddle of yellow-white walls, crimson roofs, towers, and windows gleaming in the sun, with here and there the scaffolding of new buildings.

You could, however, reconstruct the streets from familiar landmarks: there was the glittering glass roof of the Pushkin Museum, and to the left of it, by the river, was the site of the Palace of Soviets, its massive piers forming a huge circle, like a ring of gigantic teeth.

And to the right, high above the town, rose the Kremlin. Ancient towers, a grassy bank rising behind the wall, and, towering above it, the imposing white front of the palace, topped by a red flag.

He had often seen these towers, these fir trees, this proud palace, in the days before the war. He had seen them in winter and in summer, in sunshine and in rain, from the windows of buses, and from the opposite side of the river, but it now seemed to him that he had never really seen them before, that he was beholding for the first

time the enchanting beauty of the Kremlin--and he was sure the world held nothing more beautiful.

Now he was passing the Borovitskiye Gate, walking in the direction of the Lenin Library

Peering into the faces of the passers-by, he wondered why he didn't meet anyone he knew. It seemed to him he ought to meet all his friends today.

Now he was approaching the Red Square, drawing nearer with every step. And now he was in the very heart of Moscow. The city was all round him, with its never-ceasing hum, its medley of voices and laughter. The white cliff of the Hotel Moskva towered above him, and the ladderlike sky line of Gorky Street, one of the most populous and lively thoroughfares in Moscow, climbed leftwards up the slope, its plate-glass shopwindows gleaming in the sun

This was the day he had dreamed of so long!

Here he was, walking among people, brushing against them, looking lovingly into their eyes, trying to catch snatches of talk. These were the citizens of Moscow, his countrymen, and he had come back to them today after an absence of five years. . . that man with the broad shoulders, in a light-grey raincoat and felt hat, the freckled boy in a sports shirt, a rosy-cheeked woman with a baby in her arms, and another, wearing glasses and carrying a brief case from which a bottle of milk protruded, and girls, girls. . . . What a lot of girls there were! Girls in white and pink and mauve, tanned, brisk, shining-eyed. . . . They all seemed to be smiling at him, and he smiled back at them. . . . He felt as if all these people were old friends, friends whom it was a little difficult to recognize after an absence of five years. Probably he, too, had changed. . . . But they would recognize each other soon!

The paving stones on the Red Square reflected the blue of the ardent sky. Involuntarily he threw back his shoul-

ders and held his head erect. Everything here was just the same as it had been before the war: the solemn row of bluish fir trees along the wall of the Kremlin, the two sentries, with their stern, youthful faces, standing rigidly erect in front of the great shrine. . . .

Slowly, with a beating heart, he walked across the square, his head turned towards the Kremlin all the time. He saw the gold minute hand of the clock on the Spassky Tower give a jerk, reflecting for a fraction of a second the blazing sunlight.

As he was descending the steep slope to the embankment a young fellow with high cheekbones and dark eyes, wearing, like himself, a military tunic and top boots, came shyly up to him, and asked falteringly:

"Do you happen to know how to get to the Tretyakov Gallery, Comrade?"

"Do I?" he replied, almost shouting with satisfaction. "I should say I do! I'd go with you myself, but I'm keeping the Tretyakov Gallery for tomorrow. Now, listen! You cross the Kamenny Bridge—no, you'd better cross the Moskvoretsky Bridge. . . ."

He explained in great detail how to get to the Tretyakov Gallery, and followed with his eyes the departing figure, a happy smile on his lips. He could scarcely believe that tomorrow he too would be going there. For that matter he could go there today if he liked. It all depended on him—he could be there in a quarter of an hour.

And now he was in the brilliantly-illuminated entrance of the Metro station; the diffused light cast a soft glow on the marble walls and the clothes and faces of people. He was swept up to the escalators in an urgent tide of humanity.

Suddenly the feeling came over him that he had been on this moving stairway quite recently—a week ago, or

perhaps only the day before. Nothing had changed here since the day before—five years ago. . . .

People were running lightly down the stairs, turning off in various directions at the bottom. Mingling with the hum of the escalators and the sounds of innumerable voices, and at last, drowning all other sounds, came an ever-increasing roar and clangour, heralding the approach of a train. Somebody pulled his sleeve—it was an old woman from the country.

"Tell me, son—can I get to Sokolniki from here?" she asked.

"Oh, no! You've come to the wrong station—you'll have to go up the escalator and then down to another station. You must. . . ."

But a calm bass voice interrupted him.

"No need to go up. Go down these steps, Granny, and through the new tunnel to the Okhotny Ryad Station."

"What tunnel?" he asked, indignant that anyone should dare to correct him. "You've got it all wrong. You probably mean the tunnel at the Lenin Library Station."

"I mean what I say, Comrade. If you don't know the way yourself, don't try and teach other people. Go on, Granny, never mind him, take the new tunnel and you'll be all right."

Now he remembered! He had read in the papers about the new stations opened during the war, and the new tunnel joining the central stations. He must go at once and have a look at it all.

How good it felt to be in the marble coolness of the Metro on a hot July day! He was walking through the new tunnel, gazing with the critical eye of a proprietor at the alabaster decorations and the mosaic floor, inhaling the characteristic smell of the Metro.

He walked slowly, letting people overtake him. He seemed to be the only idle person among this hurrying crowd.

An hour later, exhausted by his impressions, he got out at his favourite station, Mayakovsky, and came out on the square, into the dazzling sunlight and torrid heat.

He began reading the theatre bills: A Railway Workers' Ensemble. . . . The Armenian Choir. . . . A Polish Violinist From Warsaw Conservatory. . . . A Humorous Program. . . . A Match for the Wrestling Championship. . . . So many new, unfamiliar names!

Suddenly somebody took him by the shoulder.

"Vadim!"

Turning round sharply, he saw Sergei—Sergei Palavin, his oldest friend and schoolmate. Here was a meeting at last! Now it seemed to him that he had been expecting it all along.

Froliciously moved, they embraced awkwardly, and for a few seconds could think of nothing to say.

"I rang you up this morning," said Vadim.

"I know. Well, how are you, old man?" and Sergei once again squeezed Vadim, shaking him, and laughing loudly. "You look fine. I say, you have filled out! All that on army chow?"

"You're not so very skinny yourself!"

"No comparison with you. And then your face—there's something of the veteran in it now. Imagine meeting you like this!"

"I was going to look you up tonight."

"And here we are! So you have a Red Star and two rows of Medals—not bad!"

Vadim kept looking at his friend's radiant face: Sergei had not changed much. . . . Grown a little, perhaps, and broadened out across the shoulders. He had the same fair, fluffy hair and light-blue eyes with the roguish Tatar slant, but there were lines across the high, tanned forehead which had not been there five years ago. He looked every inch the civilian on holiday, in his cream-coloured

summer suit and white sandals. Sergei had always been a bit of a dandy.

They walked along Sadovaya Street, both of them happy and excited by this long-awaited but unexpected meeting. The awkwardness of the first moments had worn off, and they were talking nineteen to the dozen, interrupting one another eagerly.

But what can be told in the first half hour? Practically nothing. They started telling each other things they had already recounted in letters. Sergei had been working in a scientific research institute in Sverdlovsk up till the end of 1943, when he was called up and sent to the Northwestern Front, remaining there till the end of the war. He had been in Moscow since December 1945—over six months now.

"And where's everybody else?" asked Vadim. "Where are Roma and Ludochka? Where's Mitya Zarechny?"

But Sergei had only seen Roma—he was in Moscow, in a watch factory. Ludochka had gone off to Kazakhstan or some such place with her husband. Mitya Zarechny was with the occupation army in Berlin. Petya Kirsanov . . . Petya was killed at the front in 1942.

"Yes, I know, somebody wrote me about it. Poor Petya. . ." Vadim fell silent. "And what are you doing, Sergei? Are you studying?"

"I mean to start this year."

"Where?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet. Perhaps at the University, perhaps somewhere else." Sergei sighed and shook his head. "High time to start! I've been hanging about doing nothing almost six months, and I'm sick of it. . . ."

Vadim had long ago made up his mind to enter the Department of Literature at the Pedagogical Institute. But he had no wish to discuss his own problems at the moment.

"You're not married, I hope?" asked Sergei suddenly.
"What an idea!"

"That's right," Sergei said sagaciously. "We shouldn't burden ourselves with a family too soon, old chap. We simply mustn't. We have to study, make our way in life, as they say, and it's ever so much easier when one is unencumbered. . . ."

Vadim wasn't listening very attentively, at any rate he did not quite take in Sergei's words.

The joyous excitement of the sunny day had not yet left him, and his head was still reeling.

They had reached the house where Sergei lived. It was a large old house on Frunze Street, with turrets at the corners, caryatids and crenellated balconies. The four top storeys were new, the red bricks not yet stuccoed.

They were met at the door by Sergei's mother, Irina Victorovna. She had aged noticeably, and gained weight, and her black hair had lost its gloss. But she was surprisingly lively for so stout a woman, and talked as loudly and incessantly as ever, continually interrupting others. She greeted Vadim as if he were her own son, kissing him, and casting a searching glance at him.

"You're a grown-up man, bless you!" she exclaimed fondly. "What shoulders! And your voice!"

The flat was in that state of disorder and bustle which usually prevails when someone is going away; Irina Victorovna held a bit of string in her hand, a light coat lay rolled up on a suitcase standing in the hall, and a thermos flask, its nickel-plated top sparkling, stood on the telephone table. Sasha, Sergei's younger brother, was to leave for his Pioneer Camp today. Just then he came running into the hall, humming a tune and smacking his forehead with a deflated volleyball. At the sight of Vadim, he stopped in confusion.

"Sasha, this is Vadim. Don't you recognize him?"

Sasha looked at Vadim from under his brows, and shook his round, cropped head, which looked as if it had been lightly powdered with sawdust. Vadim would not have known Sasha either - five years ago he had been a little chap of four, and now he was a schoolboy.

A woman's voice suddenly came from one of the rooms:

"Where's the soap dish, Irina Victorovna? It's not on the chest of drawers!"

"Take the one in the bathroom, Valya!" shouted Irina Victorovna hurriedly. "Take mine, the pink one!"

A slim, dark-haired girl of about twenty appeared in the doorway; she stopped short on seeing Vadim, narrowing her eyes shortsightedly, and giving a vague nod.

"This is Vadim, you've heard me speak of him," said Sergei. "And this is Valya."

"I imagined you quite different," said Valya, as she offered Vadim her hand; he noticed that her arms, bare to the elbows, were white and beautiful.

"I wonder what you thought I looked like?" said Vadim.

"Somehow I thought you would be dark and stocky and wear glasses."

"I can imagine the sort of things Sergei told you about me!" laughed Vadim.

"Oh, he just said you were a serious, reliable person. He's always talking about you."

"They've been friends since childhood, Valya," broke in Irina Victorovna. "Ever since they were so high!" She touched Sasha's middle, and he laughed incredulously. "Oh, but really, Sasha, I knew Vadim when he was as small as that! We were living in the country. I remember them rushing about with their kites, or trying to make a telephone, and I remember. . . . What don't I remember! And then school! The House of Young Pioneers. Some-

times there were tears- and quarrels, too—fifteen years is a long time! And here you are together again, boys! Isn't that wonderful, now! Both alive and bristling with Orders."

"Mine aren't Orders, they're only Medals," murmured Sergei, smiling and pulling Vadim towards him. "I say, Vadim, isn't my mother sentimental? A regular poet. . . "

"Now then, off with you, boys; go on in and talk as much as you like."

Saying she had to help Irina Victorovna with the housework, Valya went to the other end of the passage.

"Who's Valya?" Vadim asked as soon as he stepped into Sergei's room. "A relation?"

"No, just a friend . . . a medical student. She's a good sort—intelligent, too."

Sergei's room was immaculately neat and clean—he had always kept his desk tidy when a schoolboy. Two large glazed bookcases were stacked with neat rows of books. The bindings blended so harmoniously, the colours on them seemed so fresh, that his library looked almost like an exhibition, and one expected to come across a notice saying: "Do not touch!"

"You've moved into your father's study, I see," said Vadim, looking round the familiar room with pleasure. "This is Nikolai Stepanovich's room, isn't it? Where are the shotguns that used to hang here?" he said, pointing to the wall where a few photographs of actors and a portrait of Lermontov now hung. "Is Nikolai Stepanovich on one of his trips now? Does he go about as much as he used to?"

A shadow flitted across Sergei's brow.

"Dad doesn't live with us any more—have you forgotten?"

"Oh, yes . . . I forgot," muttered Vadim, thoroughly embarrassed. How could he have forgotten such a thing!

Just before the war Sergei's parents had separated

Vadim suddenly remembered a hot day in June—the Algebra examination was going on—when Sergei had come to school, pale and red-eyed, saying that he had been lying in the sun too long and did not feel well. He just managed to scrape through, and after the examination told Vadim that he had seen his father off the night before and had not been able to sleep afterwards. His father had left them for good, and gone to live in a town in the Caucasus. . Three weeks after the examinations war broke out.

And now Vadim and Sergei were sitting opposite each other, smoking. Both were silent, as if they had had enough of talking. There did not seem to be anything more to say.

Vadim's gaze fell upon a pencil drawing fixed beneath a sheet of glass on the desk. It was a portrait of Sergei—a cropped-headed, smiling lad in a jacket with a zip-fastener. Sergei had been in the eighth or ninth grade then, and Vadim had drawn him. In the corner of the drawing was written "Cakes," and lower down the words: "V. B. pinxit."

"Cakes!" said Vadim, smiling and looking at the drawing. "And so we meet again, Cakes. . . . Why did we call you Cakes, by the way?"

"I forget. It's ages since anyone called me that. I wonder why I was Cakes!"

Vadim shrugged his shoulders.

"Funny! I've completely forgotten why."

"We forget so many things. . . . But I do remember when you did that portrait—it was in the eighth grade; you did it for the New Year issue of our wall newspaper."

"I remember that, too."

They fell silent again, and studied the drawing. This page, torn out of an exercise book, an inky thumbprint in one corner, revived innumerable memories of that bright, noisy, far-off time when they had been schoolboys.

"You used to draw well, you should go in for art," said Sergei thoughtfully. "Have you done any war sketches?"

"Not many."

"I see. So you really got to Prague! Were you at the Third Ukrainian Front?"

"No. The Second. We marched across Rumania and Hungary. . . ."

"Did you take Budapest?"

"We weren't in the first street fights. We were sent to the north—to Komarno, and the Third Ukrainian was engaged in battle in Budapest. And afterwards. . . the Germans rushed eleven divisions up to Budapest—remember?"

Yes, yes! I remember something of the sort. . . ."

"So you see we had to tear back to Budapest. On tanks. That was a ride to Komarno, I can tell you!"

"Were you all the time in tanks?"

"Oh, yes, I was in tanks. . . ."

And then they had a good long talk about the war.

The indigo and gold of a warm summer night shone through the window. How much had been said during the evening, and how much left unsaid! They would still be talking tomorrow, and the day after, and for many more days to come.

Vadim left the house. He and Sergei had arranged to go to the Tretyakov Gallery the next day. And it was time to start getting his papers ready for the Institute—he would have to go there and find out all about it, get hold of the plan of studies, buy books. . . .

The streets were full of people—not the scurrying pedestrians of the day, but a stream of evening strollers. Their faces—gay, youthful, animated—glowed in the light

of the street lamps and electric signs, and in the radiance of the stars sprinkled generously over the high blue dome of the sky.

A whiff of fragrance came from the flowers and trees in the Gogol Boulevard. An almost empty tram clattered across the square, its bell clanging. On nights like this the people of Moscow prefer walking to riding. Vadim, too, decided to walk.

He went along the boulevard, up Metrostroyevskaya Street, and over the Krymsky Bridge . .

He felt a little drunk, without exactly understanding the cause. He had had nothing to drink but a small glass of vodka at supper, so it must be the exquisite Moscow night, descending in a warm mist upon the glow of the lighted streets, the hum of voices and laughter, the dry rustle of footsteps over asphalt pavements, the music streaming through open windows.

Ex-Sergeant Vadim Belov was drunk with happiness. . . The happiness of returning to his beloved town, to his old friends; the happiness of friendships to come, of the new life he was soon to embark upon, the life of peaceful work he had dreamed of at the front, for the sake of which he had endured so many privations, overcome so many difficulties and tramped so many weary miles in foreign lands . .

And now for the new life -the life which was to begin tomorrow!

Chapter 2

Vadim Belov, like Sergei Palavin, used his father's desk. And when autumn came, bringing cold and rainy days, he put on his father's leather coat with the broad belt, and pockets so deep that his arms disappeared in them almost to the elbows. It was an old coat, but the leather was tough; his father had bought it long ago, in the Far East.

Over the desk hung his father's photograph taken in that very coat—he had no cap on and his greying hair waved riotously and youthfully above his broad forehead, his eyes were penetrating and quizzical, perceiving and understanding all. . . . His father had had eyes of a deep blue, but in the photograph they seemed to be quite black and very much alive.

Old friends often said to Vadim's mother:

“Dima has grown strikingly like his father. His very image!”

Vadim loved to hear this—he wanted to be like his father. But Vera Fadeyevna, giving a sad little smile, generally answered:

“There is a likeness, of course. . . .”

Vadim's father had been killed at the beginning of the war, in December 1941. It was his third war, although his profession was the peaceful vocation of a teacher. For the last fifteen years he had been the Principal of a school. When, in July, his father left for the front with the People's Militia, many teachers and older pupils went to see him off at the Byelorussian Station. They clustered round Vadim's father in a noisy crowd, all talking together and wishing him farewell. Nikitina, his assistant, a little grey-haired old woman in spectacles, had cried, and Vadim's father had had to pat her on the shoulder and console her. He had been perfectly calm himself, saying humourously:

“This will be my third encounter with the Germans. It's time I was used to it.”

He looked strangely unfamiliar in his heavy army boots and fatigue cap, the rolled-up greatcoat slung across his back. He smelt strange, too, of army cloth, leather and tobacco—he had started smoking again. It seemed to Vadim that an austere, almost imperceptible change had come over his father, and that, although he was standing beside him, holding his hand, his father

was somewhere far away and did not belong either to him, or to his mother, or to these numerous friends any more. The pock-marked lad with insignia of lieutenant on his tightly-belted military tunic, who rushed past them shouting hoarsely: "Get in, comrades, get in!" seemed to be a great deal closer to his father now than any of them.

Taking his leave of Vadim, his father had said:

"The great thing is to have faith, son. It's the most important thing in life. Faith is half the battle." Then he had pressed Vadim's hand in a firm, masculine grip, and added in lowered tones

"Take care of your mother, son. You're the head of the family now—you're its mainstay."

As they went home from the station, for the first time in his life Vadim had taken his mother's arm. Nikitina, the old woman who was now the Principal, had taken Vera Fadeyevna's other arm, and talked all the way of her sons who were airmen, of her husband who had been killed in the Civil War, of the difficulty of a teacher's work. . . . She was extremely loquacious, constantly repeating and elucidating all her ideas, as is the way with schoolteachers.

"We must stick together, Vera Fadeyevna. We must stand by one another, help one another. Those of us whose men have gone to the war must give one another a helping hand. If there's anything you need, Vera Fadeyevna . . ."

Vadim had said nothing all the way. He was thinking over his father's words: "You're the head of the family now—you're its mainstay." That meant he was no longer a child; his father had entrusted his mother to his care. Of course, in the old days, every time his father had left home either in connection with his work, or for a holiday, he had invariably said in a loud voice which he tried to make very stern: "Mind you take care of Mamma!" But this time he had said it quietly, and had called her

by the strangely austere name of Mother. . . . Now a new life, full of care and responsibility, confronted him, and Vadim wondered when and how he was going to make the start.

But the very next week the "head of the family" had gone without a word to the "family" to the District Military Commissariat, and asked to be sent to the front. He was rejected, as he had been unable to produce a passport, and no one believed him when he said he was seventeen. He never told anyone about this unsuccessful attempt to enlist.

That was in September. Vadim was to enter the last grade that year. But lessons had not yet begun. He and Sergei had joined the local Youth Fire Brigade and had worked there for two months, day and night. At night he went on duty, extinguishing incendiary bombs, and in the daytime the whole brigade worked in timber yards and railway stations, but chiefly at the wharves, unloading barges of munitions. He got his sleep when he could—in the early morning and in the evening.

Standing at the window of some attic on Polyanka Street, or Korovy Val, watching the ack-ack bursts in the sky, immediately followed by a pink string of tracer bullets, Vadim was filled with a new sensation—he felt he was not only the mainstay of his family, but of the whole street, of the district, of hundreds of families, asleep or awake, unseen to him in the pitch dark of the blackout. He was responsible for the lives of thousands of people, for the safety of their houses. Later on, at the front, this feeling of responsibility became still stronger, and he felt that not only the streets and the city, but the whole country depended on him, that he was its support and responsible for its fate.

By the end of October the Youth Fire Brigade was disbanded; those who had reached military age were called up, and the younger ones went to work in Moscow muni-

tion plants. The government office in which Vera Fadeyevna worked was evacuated to Central Asia, and Vadim, much against his will, had to go with her to Tashkent.

Vera Fadeyevna was a zoologist by profession, having graduated from the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. In Tashkent they sent her to work on a large state farm, three kilometres out of town. She was sometimes away from home for weeks on end, leaving Vadim alone in their little adobe house.

Vadim entered the tenth grade in the middle of the term, successfully passed his final school examinations, and received a certificate testifying to this in Russian and Uzbek.

Vadim had never felt at home in Tashkent. It was noisy, polyglot, and terribly crowded at the time. . . . Besides, it seemed to be always raining, always dirty underfoot—the nearest approach to snow was an icy sleet. The town was all right in itself—indeed it was even beautiful, with its picturesque markets, its poplars, and the irrigation ditches besides the pavements. Camels strolled down the streets with enormous bales of cotton on their backs, quite unmoved by the hooting of the cars. Trams suddenly stopped dead because an ass had chosen to lie down on the tracks, and neither the militiaman nor the driver could make it get up. . . . All this was new to Vadim and at any other time he would have found it amusing. But he was not in the mood for observation, and nothing impressed him but the pages of the *Pravda Vostoka*—fresh from the press, giving the latest communiqués from the front.

How he longed for Moscow! He often dreamed he was there, waking up in the night, and recognizing his low, cramped room in the house on the outskirts of Tashkent with difficulty; beyond the window was the black, unfamiliar sky, embossed with great stars; an ass brayed

sleepily, frogs croaked in the irrigation ditches. He was homesick all the time. There were no letters from his father. And in March they received official notification of his death.

Spring had already arrived in Tashkent; the air was full of the fragrance of apricot blossoms, the surly little river Boz-sou grew vicious, turned yellow, overflowing its banks and almost submerging the bridges.

"I knew it..." Vera Fadeyevna had whispered, pressing the crumpled bit of paper to her breast and weeping silently, her hands trembling. Vadim put his arms round her, biting his lips to keep back the sobs rising in his throat. He must be calm. Now he really was the head of the family, its mainstay, and now it was not just for a time, but forever.... Thinking aloud, he said furiously: "Just wait till I get at them...."

But two whole years passed before Vadim could "get at them." He was only sixteen, and the troops were fighting far away on the northwest, thousands of kilometres from Tashkent....

Vadim began working in an iron foundry on the outskirts of the city. First he worked at a little "Ajax" lathe, turning out nuts and bolts, then he was moved to the foundry shop and became a moulder. There were two small cupola furnaces at the plant for turning out cast-iron stoves, crucibles and other unimportant articles. His work and the scale of the plant itself seemed shamefully insignificant to Vadim. He dreamed of working in one of the big plants, of which there were so many in Tashkent, some local, some evacuated from the west. This dream of his was not to be fulfilled, but soon his other dream came true: in May 1943 Vadim was accepted in the military school for radio operators. He left for a little town in the north of Kazakhstan.

The school was situated outside the town, on the edge of a bare sandy waste sparsely covered with prickly

plants. It was intolerably hot during the summer months, and the winter was fierce, with bitter frost and blizzards.

The training had been speeded up and in six months they finished a course which formerly took two years. All day long the boys were put through the arduous routine of a soldier's life—tramping through the sand in the terrible Asiatic heat in full marching order, digging trenches, learning to handle machine guns, being raised from their beds by alarm signals in the middle of the night, and marched in their gas masks ten kilometres in the steppe. And every day they had to spend tedious hours tapping out Morse. Vadim was considered the company's best radio operator.

By November the six months' training was over, and all those who had passed were dispatched to a distributing centre.

The troop train stopped at the station of a Moscow suburb, a place where Vadim had spent one of his summer holidays in a Young Pioneer Camp. Now everything looked quite different: the platform crowded with soldiers, the nailed and boarded shutters of the summer cottages, the bare, cold, snow-covered fields. . . . But still it was the Moscow countryside! And somewhere, quite near, was Moscow itself.

Vadim got leave that very day, and took a local train to Moscow. He wanted to see his mother, who had been living in Moscow for three months now and was working in the Ministry of Agriculture again. Wartime Moscow greeted Vadim with the unfriendly welcome of a frosty morning. It was the hour when workers on the day shift were just starting out, hurrying towards the Metro and tram stops; the only people not in a hurry were the military patrol with their red arm bands, pacing the street with measured steps. Shopwindows were boarded up and sandbags were stacked against them. An enormous silvery barrage balloon, swaying slightly, was being con-

ducted along Kaluzhskaya Street, as if it were a fantastic animal.

Vadim ran all the way, afraid that his mother might already have left for work. The telephone in their flat had been removed in the beginning of the war. The lift was not working. Vadim ran up the six flights without stopping, and let himself into the hall of the communal flat, only to be confronted by a padlock on the door of their room. Spent and exasperated, he sat down on a trunk in the hall. After trying the lock and shaking the door, he broke the transom, and climbed like a thief into the room. Everything was as he had left it: the books on their shelves, the piano with the embroidered runner on the top, the old bronze clock, and his bed, neatly covered with a green blanket. Lifting the napkin off a plate on the table, he revealed a bit of dry bread, an onion and an egg shell.

Vadim discovered an unfinished letter under the lamp on the chest of drawers:

"My dear boy!

"Is this how you keep your promise to write to me once a week? You wrote that you might be passing through Moscow. When do you think that will be?..."

On the same sheet Vadim scribbled rapidly:

"Dear Mamma!

"I'm in Moscow already, I arrived yesterday. You complain of me, but look you haven't yet finished your letter to me, and here I am, answering it..."

But after all he did not see his mother that day. There was no time, he had to go back to his unit. All he managed to do was to ring her up at her place of work from a telephone booth at the station.

"Hello! Hello! Who's speaking?" Somehow the familiar voice sounded frightened. "Is it about Dima?"

"Mamma—it's Dima! Listen..."

"Who is it? Who?"

"It's me—Vadim—Dima!" he repeated again and again with the patient perseverance of a radio operator.

Vera Fadeyevna could not believe her ears, and kept asking him to repeat it. She became excited, her voice broke, and their talk was hurried, incoherent and unsatisfactory. People waiting their turn outside the telephone booth began rapping on the glass door with coins.

"Take care of yourself, son!"

"I will, Mamma!"

"And . . . do write! Good-bye!"

She gave a sob, or was it his imagination?

A few days later, Vadim was sent with a newly-formed unit to the Second Ukrainian Front, as tank radio operator.

It was that glorious year when Stalin's devastating strategy was hurling the enemy ever westward. Vadim took part in the rout of the Germans at Korsun, and in the August offensive near Jassy. The heroic march on Bucharest, and across the Transylvanian Alps into Hungary, the battle of Budapest and the fierce engagements on the banks of Lake Balaton, the taking of Vienna and the liberation of Prague—such were the milestones on the path through Europe of Vadim and his tank.

He was one of the lucky ones, and never got a single wound. His sole mishap was concussion, received in the trenches near Jassy.

After the defeat of Germany, the tank regiment to which Vadim belonged was sent to the Far East. War with Japan had started—the arduous march across the arid sun-baked desert and the Khingan mountains, the encounters with the samurai bands in Manchuria, and at last Port Arthur.

*And at the far Pacific
Their glorious march was done . . .*

sang the Soviet sailors, who landed in the town before the arrival of the tanks.

On the very edge of the continent, in this town which had witnessed Russian valour so many years before, the Soviet Army completed its great, victorious march.

Two years of war had toughened Vadim, giving him a knowledge of people, and that courage which enables one to overcome fear. They had shown him the stuff that he, Vadim Belov, was made of. And this stuff had withstood the test. In the battle of Komarno his tank was put out of action and surrounded; only two of the crew—himself and the badly wounded turret gunner—survived. Vadim held the enemy at bay till darkness fell, using up all the hand grenades; and in the night he extricated the turret gunner from the tank, and, revolver in hand, slipped through encirclement and reached the Soviet forces.

Every day of war demanded from him the exertion of all his powers, as well as patient, selfless toil.

He had grown taller and much stronger, and his features had lost their boyish delicacy. His face was now broad and weather-beaten, like his father's, with the same massive brow. He had learned much from the war, much that was of use to him not only in war, but in everyday life. At the front he had come to know his own people, their strivings and true character, and recognized them as his own. He had seen foreign countries, and found them quite unlike the descriptions in books, or the views on postage stamps and picture postcards. He had seen them as they really were, felt their quality, breathed their air. And he had often found it stifling and impure, not like the air his lungs were accustomed to. He had seen the handsome white villas on the banks of Lake Balaton, and the sooty hovels on the outskirts of Budapest; he had seen the well-nourished, ruddy faces of the beer-swilling Vienna shopkeepers, and the grey, famished faces of the children, stretching out their hands to our tankmen for bread;

near Pilsen he had witnessed a crowd of American soldiers beating up a Negro driver, while two officers stood by, laughing; he had seen the wretched streetwalkers and the ragged rickshas of Port Arthur, and the incredible poverty of the Chinese quarters in Mukden. Yes, the people living beyond our frontiers would have to introduce great changes in their countries—harrowing, ploughing, sowing; they still had much to learn.

Vadim's determination to become a teacher was strengthened during his sojourn in Europe. This decision had been gradually and imperceptibly maturing within him ever since that bitter day when he had learned of his father's death. He felt he must fill his father's place, carry on his work. During the war his father's task had been to fight, to defend his native land. But now the guns had ceased firing, and although the peaceful life had not begun at once, it was very near, and demanded immediate consideration.

Vadim liked working with others and being in a big, friendly group like the one he had got used to in the army. He was profoundly stirred by the complex and varied life of the human collective, such innumerable characters and destinies, differing widely from one another, but all cemented by a single will in a single unit, itself engendering a mighty force. The measured steps of marching columns, even now—in his third year of military service—sent something like a thrill through his senses. He loved to hear soldiers singing in chorus, and envied the singers. He envied, too, his own regimental commander, whom the soldiers, and he, too, trusted boundlessly.

In Vadim's eyes the genius for leadership, the ability to inspire others with lofty aspirations and to lead them onward, was the greatest of all gifts. And now he remembered as a boy hearing his father speak about educating people to be fighters for communism. His father had said that this was a task demanding resolution, tal-

ent, and brains—probably the hardest of all the tasks confronting humanity. -

For almost a year after the defeat of Japan Vadim had stayed in the army, at a tiny station among the mountains of the Transbaikalia. He was demobilized in 1946, and left for Moscow with his mind quite made up to devote his life to teaching.

The first few months at the Institute had been hard. Everything had to be begun all over again, almost forgotten knowledge to be revived; he had to accustom himself once more to textbooks, every word of which had to be digested, and a précis made of the contents; to systematic studies at home and in the library; to lectures demanding unwavering attention. . . . But his chief difficulties had nothing to do with his studies. At the end of the first winter term he got only one low mark—for English. He passed the spring exams quite well, and by the time he was in his second year, was getting top marks in all subjects.

The difficulties which had beset him during the first months of study were of a different nature. There were considerably more girls than boys in the Pedagogical Institute, and in the army Vadim had become unused to this heady atmosphere of noise, youthful gaiety and laughter. Even in his school days he had never shone in feminine society, and at all school gatherings, birthday parties and celebrations, had tried to keep in the shade, every now and then shooting some witticism from his obscurity, a habit which had made him more popular with the girls than he suspected. Although he had learned to dance, he did not care for it, preferring to watch others dancing, or, still better, to join softly in choruses.

At the Institute he found himself plunged into an unfamiliar atmosphere dominated by the bright voices of

girls; at first he retreated into himself, affecting an exaggerated reserve, and suffering deeply from this self-imposed estrangement. Among the boys in his year there were a few who had been at the front, but the rest were mere youngsters, straight from the tenth grade. And it was these Vadim envied: he envied the ease with which they talked; joked and made friends with the girls, their cheerful familiarity, their wit, their expert knowledge of all branches of sport, art and literature; he even felt a shamefaced envy of their smart ties and haircuts. Throughout the first year Vadim went on wearing his military tunic, not buying himself a new suit and overcoat until his second year. And he still wore his hair cut in the old way, unable to accustom himself to the new fashions.

His first year in the Institute was spent in looking around him, in the attempt to readjust himself to the new life. It was a period of slow advancement, hard-earned, almost imperceptible victories, but above all and in spite of all it was a period of blissful, eager enjoyment, of peaceful life and work, and of the realization that he had made a good start on the main business of his life. Sometimes Vadim would be overwhelmed by a feeling of profound happiness as he sat at a lecture at the Institute, or in the library reading room, or at his desk at home, reading the paper or turning over the leaves of a book while his mother, tired out by the day's work, lay dozing on the sofa, children's cries, hooting of horns, and the music from a neighbour's radio, coming through the open window. For was not all this exactly what he had dreamed of—first during evacuation, and later in the army—a peaceful desk, books, the hush of the lecture room? And now it had become his everyday life, part and parcel of his existence.

By the time he was in his second year, this sensation of having attained happiness, of a dream come true, began

gradually to wear off, and at last disappeared. Perhaps this was just as well. A new life had started, with new cares, new strivings and hopes. And the difficulties and handicaps of the first days had gradually disappeared, too. He could afford to laugh at them now: the idle fears, the petty outbursts of vanity, the clumsy reserve and its attendant awkwardness. Now everything was back to normal, all the kinks smoothed out, and life, pursuing its even course, had become easier—it even seemed to be passing more rapidly.

Vadim really became an undergraduate only in his second year—till then he was just a demobilized soldier. But now he had worked himself firmly and securely into the life of the student body; he felt as much at home with youngsters who had not smelt powder, and at whom he used to look askance and with secret envy, as with boys of his own age. Undergraduate life, with its common interests, put everyone on the same footing, bringing together the most unlikely people, and holding them in the bonds of friendship. Then it was that study became easier, incomparably easier than it had been during the first few months. And a true taste for study, a love for the Institute, were born.

Vadim's happiest hours in the Institute were no longer the lonely evenings spent in the reading room, but the noisy gatherings in the club, the jolly Saturday nights, the heated discussions started in the lecture hall and continued in the corridors and out-of-doors. His best moments were those when he was not alone.

Sergei Palavin was a great help in many ways. Vadim had been fortunate enough to have his friend with him when he entered the Institute—Sergei did not get into the University, and decided, rather than lose a year, to enter the Pedagogical Institute.

Sergei's character was in almost every respect the opposite of Vadim's. For him there were no difficulties

except the usual ones presented by exams. He got into the swing of undergraduate life with wonderful ease at the very start, making friends with boys, getting in the good books of the teachers, and adopting a friendly, casual, if slightly condescending, attitude towards the girls, many of whom were ready to succumb to his charms.

Vadim was proud to have such a brilliant and successful friend. He felt more sure of himself in Sergei's presence, and tried at first to be next to him at lectures, never leaving his side during breaks, while Sergei made friends with everyone, talking football with some, discoursing learnedly on the problems of linguistics with others, entertaining the youngsters with stories of the war, smiling at the girls, exchanging jokes with a passer-by, offering cigarettes. . . . Vadim was amazed at Sergei's gift for being at home in any setting, however unfamiliar.

"You have a special gift, Sergei!" he exclaimed, sincere admiration in his voice. "How quickly you make friends with people!"

"Oh, well!" Sergei answered, with a satisfied smile. "I'm a psychologist, you know. I can see right through people. And, by the way, there's nothing hard in getting intimate with people, it's much harder to break away from them."

Sergei was often at Vadim's home; they went to the cinema together, and visited exhibitions, and occasionally read up for examinations and seminars, though as a rule Vadim preferred working alone. Vadim really had only two friends when he came back from the front: his mother and Sergei Palavin. Hardly any of his old friends were still in Moscow, and those who were, he seldom met.

Vadim found his mother greatly changed—she had aged and gone quite grey. She still worked a lot, leaving early in the morning, returning late at night. She was often sent on business trips to remote places—to Volga kolkhozes, to Siberia, to the Altai. Her colleagues—spe-

cialists in cattle breeding—sometimes came to Moscow and stopped for a day or two at their flat. Most of them were no longer young, but they looked healthy and had sunburnt faces. These simple, cheerful folk always had a million things to do on their flying visits to Moscow. They always brought presents: sometimes a watermelon, sometimes honey, and once even a leg of mutton from Kazakhstan. All day long they rushed about on their business, coming home late at night, tired and hungry; but instead of going to sleep on the sofa directly after supper, they would sit up till midnight talking to Vera Fadeyevna—all about repairs of dairies, fodder-grass cultivation, the wool clip, milk yields.... Their luggage on departing was invariably swollen with gifts and purchases, and they left looking smarter than on their arrival, for they never failed to take advantage of their trip to buy themselves something—a new coat, or at the very least a tie. Soon after they had left, Vera Fadeyevna would receive a telegram saying: "Arrived safely greetings to son expecting visit from you."

Vadim's relations with his mother had always been simple and friendly. Vera Fadeyevna had never been a sentimental mother, never pestered him with her caresses or exaggerated solicitude, the way many so-called loving mothers do. And very early Vadim began to regard himself as an independent human being, simply because he was regarded as such by his mother.

Vadim spent his time in patient, persevering work. Perhaps at the beginning, while still in his first year, Vadim worked with greater diligence and enthusiasm than he did now that he had got used to undergraduate life and learned to value his time and to realize that the world held many wonderful things besides lectures and study-groups.

And so the second year came to an end. He was halfway through his studies now, and what remained no

longer seemed alarming—there was no more strangeness to get accustomed to, as there were no more intimidating difficulties.

And on the threshold of his third year, just as he was becoming a mature student, Vadim fell in love. Love took him by surprise, and coming a little late—for it was his first love—it was full of incongruities and absurdities, and Vadim hardly knew which predominated—its bitterness or its happiness.

Chapter 3

Vadim banged on the door. For a long time no one answered. At last he heard someone in felt slippers approaching from the other end of the hall; it was Arkadi Lvovich, their neighbour—how long it took him to reach the door!

“What are you kicking up such a row for? Is there a fire somewhere?”

“I shall be late for the theatre!” Vadim answered, breathless with excitement and haste. “I must be there in forty minutes. And I have to go to Smolenskaya Square first.”

“Lock the door properly,” said Arkadi Lvovich, moving away. He halted outside the door of his room, however, to ask in a voice which showed his interest in the question:

“And how do you mean to get to Smolenskaya Square?”

Arkadi Lvovich's hobby was rationalization, especially in connection with transport. He was full of original ideas on the subject and had worked out a regular system, which he was fond of explaining, for the quickest and most economical ways of getting anywhere in town. Aware of this passion, Vadim answered, resolutely and briskly, so as to put a stop to all further discussion:

“By Metro.”

"Metro?" Arkadi Lvovich exclaimed in astonishment. "You must be mad! I can tell you a much better way—take any tram to Kaluzhskaya Square, cross the square and...."

"I'm going by Metro!" shouted Vadim, disappearing into his room. But Arkadi Lvovich went on giving his advice from outside the door.

"Vadim! Walk to the Park of Culture, that'll take you two minutes, take the '10' or the 'B' bus" (here the door opened slightly, revealing the spectacled face of Arkadi Lvovich, a black silk cap on his shaven skull). "Listen—in precisely seventeen minutes...."

"I can't listen, I'm late as it is! What time is it?"

"And you call yourself a Moscovite!" cried Arkadi Lvovich, really vexed, and slammed the door. Then, glancing in once more, he shouted, his voice still cross: "Twenty to seven!"

There was a note for Vadim on his desk: "I shall be late today, we have a meeting after work. If you are hungry, have dinner without me."

But he could not even think of eating: he was experiencing a strange emotion, rather like the nervous excitement before an examination. Besides, he might be late!

"Which shirt should I put on—the blue one, or the striped one with detachable collar?" Vadim pondered this problem while spreading out his shaving gear. "The blue one, of course! A detachable collar's such a nuisance, and then the studs.... I wonder where the ticket is?"

This was the tenth time he had become panicky about the ticket, fumbling for it in all his pockets.

For a full minute Vadim studied his face in the mirror—it was flushed, the nose and cheeks reddened by frost, the skin over the cheekbones white. His thick brown hair stuck out at the sides, making him look like a clown. He must smooth it down somehow—would wetting do?

As he was soaping his jaw, Sergei came in.

"Hullo! 'Attired in man's apparel, the goddess sets off to the masked ball,' eh? Have I come at the wrong moment?"

"It's all right, come in! Take off your coat!" said Vadim without turning from the glass. "I'm off to the theatre. I must leave in ten minutes."

"With Lenchka Medovskaya?"

"Yes."

Vadim had given his answer almost mechanically, as indifferently as if he thought nothing of it, but in reality Sergei's question had taken him aback. How did Sergei know?

"Yes, I'm going with Lenchka Medovskaya," he repeated, still affecting nonchalance. "How did you know by the way?"

"Oh, I heard Lena tell someone in the Institute yesterday that you had most chivalrously offered her a ticket."

"Did she really say 'chivalrously'?"

"Yes, and the worst of it is I forgot all about it and came to see you on business. Too bad!"

"What business? Will it take long?"

"More than ten minutes, anyhow. Oh, well..." Sergei sighed and took off his coat. Seating himself in an armchair beside Vadim, he drew a bulky manuscript out of his pocket. "This is Nina Fokina's paper on the novels of Vera Panova. I'm to be her critic, you see, and have to speak next week at the meeting of the Student Research Society. And the stuff's poor—very poor! I'll have much to criticize."

"Poor? That's funny! Nina's a serious girl, 'brainy,' as Ivan Antonovich would say..."

"Serious, is she? Listen—all she's done is to use an old essay of hers like the ones we all had to write for the course in Soviet Literature, expand it a bit, and hand

it in as research work. D'you call that serious? Common-places, mere verbiage, not a single original idea. . . . And the S.R.S. is a research society. It's for students, of course, but it's a research society all the same. Say what you will, such works weaken the whole idea of the S.R.S. What's the difference between it and ordinary studies, then? None at all! Don't you agree with me?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" Vadim answered. He was not listening very attentively to Sergei because he had cut his cheek and was now doing all he could to stop the bleeding and somehow conceal the cut.

"I meant to read you a few passages from this 'research work' and consult you about it. Never mind, you'll see for yourself at the meeting. I mean to speak out. . . . It has put all sorts of gloomy thoughts into my head."

"What—about the futility of all things earthly?"

"Worse than that," Sergei shook his head gravely. "I have a paper to write myself, and I haven't started it yet. And have no wish to start. No stimulus."

"That's too bad."

"It's no joking matter, Vadim. I'm beginning to think—is there any point in going on with it? Are you sure the S.R.S. is really a research society?"

"We must make it that," said Vadim. "It depends entirely on us."

Sergei gave a wry smile.

"You answer as if you were at a press conference. In my opinion a research society should contribute something to learning, and so far we are not equipped for this. We do nothing but echo truths discovered long ago. Some do this with more erudition, others with less, that's all. Like a literary circle in the House of Young Pioneers."

"And so you mean. . . ." said Vadim, snatching up his towel and soap, and rushing towards the bathroom, "to leave the society, is that it?"

When he returned, with cheeks moist and pink, and rumpled hair, Sergei answered:

"So far I'm not thinking of leaving, but I do think a radical change is necessary. As for my own paper, if I ever do write it, I shall try to make it quite different. It will have to be something absolutely new. And I'll need plenty of time for it."

"Well, I wish you luck! Sergei, what *is* the time, exactly?"

"Seven minutes to seven.... But answer me —am I right?"

"On the whole you are. Of course, our work is not brilliant," said Vadim hurriedly. "Oh, I shall be late! She'll go without me!"

"Perhaps it all boils down to this," continued Sergei, "too many unsuitable people have joined the society. We ought to leave only the most active and talented members, and the rest, the small fry, the ballast—should be ruthlessly ejected. Of course, there'll be weeping and wailing, but it must be done—the cause demands it. After all, not everyone is fitted to do research work!"

"Of course, of course. . . Give me that tie! There—under the dictionary!"

Sergei handed him the tie with a gesture of despair.

"You're insane! No use talking to you now!"

"Yes there is. I'm listening to you most attentively," Vadim retorted, "and I don't agree with you, if you wish to know. For instance, how can you say at the moment who's small fry and who isn't? The S.R.S. has been in existence only six weeks, lots of people haven't had a chance to show what they're capable of."

"That's just the trouble. But we'll talk it over tomorrow. You can think of nothing but being late just now. If only you felt the same about being late for lectures!"

"Silly ass! Don't you see she might go without me?"

Vadim got into his suit hurriedly and stood combing his hair in front of the mirror.

"Well, am I all right?"

"You're all right. Perfectly all right!"

"What about my tie? Will it do?"

"Your tie's all right too. Only never button your coat all the way down."

Sergei went up to him and unbuttoned the last button of his coat. "A single-breasted coat should be buttoned in the middle only."

They put on their overcoats and went out. Suddenly Vadim remembered he had no handkerchief, and Sergei gave him his—a silk one, with green and brown checks.

"Well—good luck!" said Sergei, winking. "Remember me to Lenochka!"

Lena Medovskaya was in Vadim's class at the Pedagogical Institute. Somehow, until they were both in their third year, Vadim had never taken much notice of Lena, regarding her as just one of the twenty-four girls in his class.

But one autumn day he realized that his attitude to Lena had changed. It was at the very beginning of the winter term, and he did not know whether it was Lena who had become different, or he who had changed. Perhaps boys from other departments had opened his eyes—it does happen sometimes! Every now and then one of them would take him aside and ask: "Who's that girl in your class—the one with the curly hair, always laughing?" "Oh, you mean Lenochka, I suppose. Yes, she's in my class," he'd answer and then add facetiously: "Shall I introduce you? She's a wonderful girl, very jolly and sings beautifully." Then his replies became more reserved: "That's Lena Medovskaya. Rather a nice girl." And still later he started answering those questions with an indifferent air: "Who? Oh, that's Medovskaya, a top

student and member of the editorial board of our wall newspaper."

It was owing to mere chance that they were going to the theatre together. One day the week before, Vadim and Lena had stayed after studies to help with the wall newspaper: Vadim was artist-in-chief, and Lena editor of the art-and-literature section. A girl in the busy group began talking about a play she had recently seen at the Musical Comedy Theatre.

"I laughed so much, I thought I'd have to cry the whole of the next day. But I didn't—isn't that strange?"

The Chief Editor, Maxim Vilkin (generally known as Max), a lean, sharp-featured youth wearing thick-lensed glasses and a navy-blue ski suit, raised his curly head from the table.

"Lena must be the cleverest of us all, then. She laughs incessantly, and leaves herself no time to cry."

"Oh, Max!" Lena protested, smiling. "What about when you try to be funny? That's when I cry! You can all make bad jokes, boys, but not one of you thinks of buying tickets, and inviting a fellow student to the theatre. Don't faint—it can be included in our cultural work -and put into our reports."

"Nobody's fainting," answered Vadim from the floor, where he was sprawling over a cartoon. "We'll just go and buy tickets."

"I'd like to see you!"

A minute later, raising his head, Vadim caught Lena gazing steadily at him. He fixed his eyes on hers— they were light brown, teasing and solemn at the same time— just a second longer than the occasion required. Then he smiled at the sudden resolution he had made.

Next day Vadim bought two tickets for the play spoken of on the previous evening.

"Here's your ticket. It's for Saturday," said Vadim, coming up to Lena in the hall.

She did not seem surprised.

"No—really? You *are* a brick!" She actually laughed with delight. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing!"

"What d'you mean 'nothing'? You bought the tickets, didn't you?"

"Er... yes... but you don't owe me anything."

Lena shook her head energetically, and pushed the ticket towards him.

"Then I won't go!"

"All right!" Vadim suddenly felt shy. For a moment he thought of pretending it had cost less, but dismissed the idea as foolish.

"The ticket costs eighteen rubles. I thought it would be nice to be near the stage."

"Marvelous! I'll pay you back when I get my stipend, will that do?"

"Of course!"

"I'm so glad, Vadim!" said Lena, smiling. "Really I am. I haven't seen anything amusing for ages."

... And now, panting and diffident, a freshly-lighted cigarette between his teeth, he was standing at her door. He had been to see Lena once before about the wall newspaper. But then he had thought nothing of it, boldly ringing the bell as if he were standing at the door of his own flat.

The bell was answered by Albina Trofimovna, Lena's mother; she was a pretty, youngish woman with very black eyelashes and fair plaits arranged round her head, giving her a youthful air.

"Oh, hullo, Vadim!" she said with a friendly smile. "Come in. Lenochka's just up, she had a nap after dinner."

"Oh, isn't she ready?"

"Don't worry, it doesn't take Lenochka long to get dressed. In that respect she's not like other girls."

While Lena, aided by her mother, dressed in the next

room, Vadim sat on the sofa, turning over the pages of a magazine, but he could not keep his mind on it, and soon put it down. He was agitated, but not by the thought that they would be late for the theatre, that by now they ought to be in the Metro, while Lena was not even dressed. He had forgotten all about the time, and was absorbed in a minute examination of the mauve wallpaper, the lamp shade hovering like a rosy cloud over the table, the massive sideboard, the piano, on the top of which stood a host of knickknacks. His attention was caught by a book, also on the top of the piano, with an old-fashioned "marbleized" binding, and a ribbon book-marker. From where he sat he could just make out the name of the author—Danilevsky. Albina Trofimovna's probably reading it, he thought, remembering that Lena had told him her mother was a great reader and adored historical novels. Vadim liked Albina Trofimovna for reading Danilevsky, though he would have laughed at his mother, had he found her reading a book of that sort. Altogether, he thought Lena's mother a most agreeable, well-educated woman, and exceedingly beautiful—like Lena herself.

Everything about the room, to the least detail, was full of peculiar, mysterious significance for Vadim. For here lived Lena, here she made her hasty breakfasts, glancing anxiously towards the clock in its round, walnut case, here she sat of an evening sipping her tea, her face stained a deep pink in the glow of the shaded lamp; here she played the piano, or read, seated on the sofa with her legs drawn up, as she was fond of sitting on window sills at the Institute. . . . And suddenly Vadim felt he did not want to go anywhere. Why must they go to that stupid theatre? He would gladly have presented Albina Trofimovna with the tickets, just to stay here alone with Lena, if only for a short time.

Lena's voice, cheerful and imperious, came ringing out from the next room:

"Vadim! You may come in!"

Mechanically he looked at the clock—fifteen minutes had passed—they were certainly late for the first act.

Lena was standing in front of the mirror in a long dark-green dress, which brought out the delicate tan of her arms and neck. She seemed taller, slenderer, more feminine than usual. Vadim stopped in the doorway, amazed—he had had no idea she was *so* beautiful.

"Quick, Vadim, give me your advice—which suits me better—the brooch or the necklace?" she cried, turning to face him, holding a round garnet brooch against her breast, her head held coquettishly on one side. "Do you like it?"

Looking, not at the brooch, but at her serene and happy face, Vadim said with conviction:

"It's lovely but we're late for the first act."

"I've been ready for ages!" cried Lena, snatching up a scent bottle and shaking a drop on the palm of her hand. She then passed her hand quickly over the front of her dress, and with the same quick movements dabbed herself behind the ears.

"It keeps longer behind the ears. Remember that," she explained in a businesslike way. "Shall I put some on you?"

"No, I don't like it."

At last they put on their coats, bade good-bye to Albin Trofimovna, and went out. Just then a "Pobeda" car stopped at the door, and a man in a loose black coat and felt hat stepped out. Lena rushed up to him.

"Dad! May we take the car to Mayakovsky Square? We're late for the theatre, and this is Vadim Belov, from my class."

The man shook Vadim's hand in silence, and said, without displaying great concern:

"Late for the theatre? That's too bad. . . . I don't know, ask Nikolai Fyodorovich—if he doesn't mind, I don't. If it's no inconvenience to him. . . ."

Vadim thought he could sense restrained disapproval in Medovsky's voice; it even seemed to him that he had shaken hands with him in none too friendly a way. Lena appealed to the driver, calling him "darling," and the thing was settled in no time.

They quickly clambered into the car. Vadim banged the door, and they rushed ahead. Lighted windows, street lamps, and the indistinct faces of passers-by flew past them. . . . The car jolted as it turned a corner, and Lena was thrown against Vadim for a moment. She laughed and cried out: "Oh, Kolenka, take care!" Vadim would have liked to beg Kolenka to go on just like that and not to be in a hurry to get to the theatre.

But in a few minutes the car stopped, and just as the third bell was ringing Vadim and Lena rushed to their seats.

They were sitting quite near the stage. The curtain was not yet up. The noise, the creaking of the seats, the buzzing of voices were gradually dying down. Her shoulder touching Vadim's, Lena inspected the boxes through opera glasses.

"I love looking at people in the theatre," she said in a low voice, "and trying to guess who they are and what their lives are like. It's awful fun, isn't it? That one there, for instance," without lowering the glasses Lena moved closer to Vadim, and her voice dropped mysteriously: "That boy . . . he's probably a worker . . . he must have got his ticket as a bonus . . . he's alone, you see. . . . And there, a little to the right, do you see that group of girls talking away, they're probably students—see them? Gossiping about someone from their own class. Just like us—when-ever we get together we start talking about somebody.

They must be from the Biology Department of Moscow University—they all wear glasses there.”

People began turning round to look at Lena, some with curiosity, others with disapproval. But they all went on looking—the men gazing long into her face, the women chiefly studying her dress. Lena did not seem to notice their glances, but Vadim felt mingled embarrassment and pride. It was delightful to be sitting next to this beautiful girl, who attracted such general attention.

“You have got an imagination!” he said, coughing into his hand. “But people are beginning to stare at you.”

“Why? Who is? What do I care!” said Lena lightly, and started talking louder: “You know, I’d like to have heaps and heaps of friends, as many as there are in this theatre. And get letters from all of them. . . .”

She stopped for a moment as the lights went out and the curtain rose. Something clashed and hissed in the orchestra, evidently in imitation of an approaching train, for the stage was set as a station. Lena concluded her remarks in a whisper:

“... get letters from them all, go and visit them, and meet them at the station in Moscow. . . . I do love meeting people at the station!”

Vadim took Lena’s hand and pressed her slender wrist.

“What’s that, Vadim!” said Lena, her voice stern and rather loud.

Someone hissed angrily at them from the front row. Vadim muttered confusedly, glad of the darkness:

“I only . . . look, the play’s begun. . . .”

Something very amusing must have been going on on the stage, for there was laughter in the pit, and someone in one of the balconies even clapped. Vadim did not see the joke, altogether he did not take in the first act, for although he was looking at the stage, his thoughts were elsewhere. A fat little man in tight trousers was shouting

and bustling about, and the house received his every word with peals of laughter. Two handsome men, one with a moustache, the other with whiskers, were making love to a tall blonde girl with a proud face.

"But she's quite old! She shouldn't take such parts," Lena whispered. "Look at her skinny arms—they make me sick!"

Vadim nodded, although to him the blonde girl did not look at all old—on the contrary, he thought her fascinating and graceful. At last he understood that the only man who really cared for her was an indigent youth, a chemist's assistant, who kept in the background and said nothing. The play was amusing but Vadim could not concentrate on it, or understand what people were laughing at. With dismay he thought what a poor figure he must be cutting in the eyes of others. Helpless with laughter, Lena kept squeezing his hand. There were tears in her eyes. She wiped them away with her handkerchief, which she then waved in the air, enveloping Vadim in delicate perfume.

Vadim was absorbed in the task of holding out his hand in readiness for Lena. Only once he managed to give a hearty laugh, but just then the house was hushed.

He was hot. The faint smell of glue and varnish from the stage blended with the fragrance from all sorts of different perfumes rising from the auditorium. After the first act they went into the refreshment room, and Vadim bought two cakes and a bottle of lemonade. Smiling happily, Lena hummed the tunes she had just heard from the stage, and asked eagerly:

"How did you like the station scene? And the Colonel—he's good, isn't he?"

They sauntered about the vestibule, looking at the photographs of actors on the walls. Lena knew something about almost every one of them—when they had begun

acting, in what theatre they had acted before, what their best parts had been. Vadim was disgracefully ignorant about all this, and was relieved when the bell rang for the second act.

Towards the end of the play Vadim had grasped the outlines of the artless plot. The handsome young men were laying snares for the blonde. Suspecting nothing, she had given her heart to one of the gay deceivers—the one with the whiskers. The blonde's father—the fat man in tight trousers—also thought no ill, poor dear, and loved them like his own sons. But in the end it all came out—the old man was ruined, his daughter deceived....

Vadim kept his eyes on the stage and followed the movements of the actors as in a dream; the people seemed unreal, ethereal characters; he felt for them, and sympathized with them, not for their absurd sufferings and fantastic passions, but because they somehow expressed feeling now surging within him. As he watched the blonde girl with the proud expression he thought her beautiful because he identified her with Lena. And when the impecunious chemist's assistant went out into the night, dismissed by his cruel beloved, Vadim felt a lump rise in his throat, and his sight was dimmed.

But the end was happy, and once more the fat man amused everyone, and Vadim laughed with the rest.

Now he was tortured by the idea that he would seem very dull and prosaic to Lena after all this brilliance and gaiety. What would they find to talk about?

When the play was over, the actors were as usual called to the footlights, but Vadim had lost all interest in them. He waited obediently in the aisle, clapping and looking listlessly at the performers, who hastened into the wings in the most businesslike manner, only to come running back with smiles of modest gratification.

"After all, it's a silly farce," said Lena as they were coming out. "It made us laugh, but tomorrow we won't

be able to remember what it was all about. And the music was nothing special."

"Yes," Vadim agreed. "It's trash, of course."

He saw Lena home by the Metro. For a long time neither of them spoke.

"It's always that way—one laughs too much, and then feels sad for some reason," said Lena, yawning.

She looked tired, and kept shutting her eyes, rocking in the cushioned seat. Vadim looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She seemed still more beautiful now, with her pale face and long thick eyelashes. As they emerged into the square Vadim brought out a sentence he had been mulling over while they were in the train:

"You and I ought to go and see something serious now."

"Yes," Lena nodded, and then added: "What did you say?"

"I said we ought to go and see something serious. At the Art Theatre, or the Maly. . . ."

"Oh. . . . Yes, only there won't be time. The seminars are starting. Will it be Kozelsky on Monday?"

Vadim nodded.

"I'm terrified of him! He's so exacting. Altogether he looks down on us--don't you think so? As if we were characters in the novel of some minor author. Has Lagodenko passed his exams yet?"

"No."

"You see! I'm terribly afraid. . . ."

"You needn't be afraid. He's not so strict with the girls."

They fell silent again.

"Vadim, you've grown so strange this year," Lena said suddenly. "You used to be so openhearted, you were always joking. And now you never seem to have a word to say for yourself. And you treat me like a stranger. What's the matter with you?"

"It's all your imagination."

"No, Vadim, I'm sure it isn't! Sergei has noticed it, too—we were talking about you the other day. And if anyone knows you, he ought to!"

Vadim did not answer. With amazement and dismay he realized that he could find no words to carry on the conversation. He was always tongue-tied nowadays—lack of assurance, a certain timidity seemed to paralyze his movements, thoughts and words. Inwardly he was furious with himself, called himself a lout, but he could not get the better of this exasperating state of mind.

"Yes, Sergei has noticed it, too," Lena repeated. "He even suggests an explanation . . . but, of course, that's nonsense . . ."

She broke off, biting her lip, as if embarrassed; but Vadim felt she had made the pause on purpose, expecting him to follow up the subject, or at least to ask what Sergei's explanation had been.

However, he only said:

"By the way, he sent you his love. He looked in on me today."

"Thanks. Does he often come to see you? You've been friends since childhood, haven't you?"

"Yes, since school."

"How nice to have gone to school together, then to the Institute, and then to the same work! He must be a real friend!" said Lena thoughtfully.

"Sergei? Of course! He's a real friend!" Vadim felt a sudden relief, and a wave of energy came over him as he continued enthusiastically: "He and I met two-and-a-half years ago, right in front of the theatre we've just been in. I had arrived in Moscow that very day, and was wandering about the town when we met. It was the merest chance, you know."

"I can imagine how glad you both were!"

"Glad isn't the word, we were simply crazy—the unexpectedness of it, the joy, everything. . . ." Vadim laughed and shook his head. "It was a wonderful day for me in more ways than one. . . . Sergei had intended to enter the Philology Department of the Moscow University. . . "

"I know."

"But he didn't get in, so rather than lose a year he decided to go where I did. He's awfully clever. He'll make a name for himself as a scholar—I'm absolutely sure of that. And what a memory he has! He only has to go through the list of dates in the history book once to be able to reel it off by heart the next moment. Can you imagine such a thing? He can. He already knows two languages perfectly, and is studying a third—French. Languages are no trouble to him. . . ."

"Really?" Lena asked, her interest roused. "He must be wonderful!"

"He is. And he's so talented—he writes poetry, and at school he used to write prose, short stories. Very good ones, too. Have you read his poems in the wall newspaper?"

"I have, and I liked them. About Wall Street, weren't they?"

"Yes, political. But he writes lyrics, too. And he knows something about engineering—he was technician in a tool shop during the war, at a scientific research institute, mind! They don't give you two years' exemption from the army for nothing! Oh, yes, Sergei's gifted and versatile—there can be no doubt about that. He goes in for sport, too. . . ."

Vadim expatiated with perfectly sincere enthusiasm on Sergei's qualities. He extolled his erudition, his wit, his knowledge of science and art, his disposition and common sense, and although Vadim himself was beginning to realize that he was overdoing it, and even to sense a vague danger to himself in the conversation, he could

not stop. With a strange sense of pleasure he went on endowing his friend with all manner of good qualities and virtues.

Lena listened attentively.

"I read somewhere that if a Russian has nothing else to boast of, he boasts of his friends," she suddenly said with a smile. "Of course, you know, I'm only joking! And were you such staunch friends in childhood, too?"

"Oh yes. We had heaps of adventures together. We used to go on tramps, we explored caves, and once we nearly got lost in an abandoned quarry. The things we did!"

"When I was a little girl, I only liked boys, all my friends were boys. I couldn't bear girls' games—dolls and houses and all that."

"All girls say that, by the way," said Vadim.

"No, they don't! Lots of girls like that sort of thing."

Lena, feeling rather snubbed, fell silent. They were now in a broad street, deserted at this hour. The pavement dimly reflected the rays of the street lamps, like a frozen river. A slight frost had set in towards evening and the pavement was covered with a thin coat of ice, which made walking slippery. Vadim took Lena's arm.

"Sergei is good-looking, by the way—delicate features," said Lena. "Though, of course, that's not so important for a man."

Vadim smiled.

"Thanks. You're very kind!"

"Now you're talking nonsense, Vadim!" said Lena severely.

They turned into a side-street and stopped in front of a two-storey building. Behind a transparent orange curtain a light shone from one of the windows.

"Here we are! Mamma's sitting up for me."

They stood at the front door—Lena on a step, Vadim on the pavement. Her face was a vague patch of white in

the darkness, and her ash-blonde hair looked quite black beneath her cap. Vadim lingered as if waiting for something to happen. But, as in a dream, he could neither move towards her nor go away.

"I'm very glad we went," Lena said quietly, holding out her hand to him.

"And probably still gladder to be back?"

Lena merely shook her head. She was smiling. Vadim could not see her smile, but felt it, he even knew exactly the way she was smiling: her upper lip slightly raised, her white teeth gleaming faintly.

"I really am glad, Vadim." This she said very quietly.

He was still holding her hand. And they stood there, plunged for a long moment in the profound stillness of the night.

"What is important for a man?" muttered Vadim, suddenly taking Lena by the shoulders and pulling her towards him. For a second she clung to him, hiding her face on his shoulder, then, setting her hands against his chest, she threw her head back.

"No, no, let me go! That is not the most important thing for a man, either," she said in a hurried whisper "Don't, Vadim! We're friends, aren't we?"

"Of course we're friends, Lenchka..."

"You see! And this... this is quite different. And it's not done... we mustn't, don't you understand?" she said all this in a whisper, gently, persuasively, as if she were explaining something to a child. "It shouldn't be so easy, so sudden..."

"Is it so sudden?" Vadim answered, abashed, also in a whisper. "We've known each other over two years, haven't we?"

But he relaxed his grasp on her shoulders. Lena straightened up, and, standing on the top step, adjusted her cap. He was looking up into her smiling face, which

somehow looked almost dark—was she blushing, or was it the frost?

"You're very strong, I see. . . . Well now, good-bye! See you the day after tomorrow!"

"Lena!"

But she was inside already. Vadim went right up to the door.

"Lena, we will go and see something serious, won't we?"

"Something serious?" Lena echoed, and stood silently on a stair for a moment, before saying cheerfully:

"Why, Vadim, of course! As soon as we have finished with the seminars. We'll go anywhere—to the Bolshoi Theatre, if you like! Shall we go to *Raimonda*?"

Vadim nodded. Lena waved her hand and disappeared round a turn in the stairs. A thrilling, delicate fragrance hung in the frosty air between the double doors

Chapter 4

Suddenly Vadim heard a bass voice booming out:

"Whenever I see a student going to sleep at one of my lectures I speak louder, to wake him up—the puppy!"

This was Krechetov's favourite joke.

Throwing back his head, Vadim found himself transfixed by Krechetov's quizzical blue glance, while all the students were turning their heads towards him and laughing.

"Ivan Antonovich! Nothing of the sort!" said Vadim in confusion. "'Pushkin's tragedies were the embodiment of his ideas on . . . ' You see!"

"All right, all right!"

Krechetov nodded, his glasses glaring wickedly for a second.

"Let's consider you dreamed it I was only joking, you know. Let us proceed...."

Krechetov was giving a special series of lectures on Pushkin. It was impossible to take notes at his lectures: he spoke rapidly and enthusiastically, continually jumping from one character to another. Though fascinating, he was hard to follow. And yet Sergei, who was sitting next to Vadim, scribbled in his notebook indefatigably throughout the lecture. Glancing over his shoulder, Vadim caught a glimpse of long sheets of closely-written paper, and at the top of one he made out the words, in thick block letters: "Chapter 1." Vadim remembered that the other day Sergei had spoken about some novel he had begun writing.

But why should he bring it to the Institute? Every now and then Sergei turned towards the window, biting his nails, lost in thought. His face wore an expression of extreme preoccupation.

The monitor of studies, fat, pop-eyed Tezya Velikanova, sent Vadim a note: "Vadim, tell your neighbour not to bite his nails. It's a disgusting habit." Vadim shrugged his shoulders. Why should she distract his attention from the lecture with such nonsense? Fat Tezya was giving herself the airs of a mistress of deportment, dealing out admonitions right and left.

Vadim felt extremely curious about this novel of Sergei's. What could it be about? In his heart he did not quite believe that Sergei had suddenly blossomed out into a literary talent. But you never can tell.... Sergei was a chap of whom anything might be expected. However, he gave evasive replies to Vadim's inquiries. "Wait a bit, old chap! You'll soon find out."

In the break, Vadim asked him: "Well, have you finished your *War and Peace*?"

"Finished? I've brought the first chapter, I want our typist to copy it. But there was some polishing up

to be done, some finishing touches to put, and I didn't have time yesterday. So I had to do it during the lecture, unfortunately. You know how I admire Ivan Antonovich...."

Lena came up to them. She had on a new dress, and her hair was done in a new way, with a bow at the back. It made her look like a schoolgirl.

"Who's finished what?" she asked brightly.

"Sergei's writing a novel."

"Are you, Sergei? How interesting! What about? The war?"

"No, Lena."

"Well, what is it about then? Or is it a secret?"

"It's no secret. But you see it isn't nearly finished, and I don't know how it'll work out. Perhaps nothing will come of it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well..." Sergei smiled modestly, and made a diffident gesture. "It takes talent, Lena. And perhaps I haven't any—who knows! So, you see, I don't want to talk about it beforehand."

"Isn't he modest," thought Vadim to himself, chuckling. "And I bet he's quite sure he's got talent, really."

He felt a sudden desire to make fun of this half-baked author. Winking at Lena, he said gravely:

"Ivan Antonovich was in top form today, wasn't he? Fancy, even Palavin started taking notes!"

"Did he? Wasn't it his novel he was writing?" laughed Lena. "Oh, but really, I would so like to read it! Perhaps one day you'll be a great writer, a laureate, and travel all over the world."

Some girls came running up to Lena, and began talking very fast, very loud, and all together. The noisiest of all was, of course, Lusya Voronkova, who spoke in a shrill, piercing voice, and made fluttering gestures with her hands.

"Lena, do you take notes of Krechetov's lectures?"

"I try to."

"You see! It's simply awful! I adore him, but we shall have to sit to him for our exams, you know! It's nothing but fireworks, metaphors, sheer impressionism."

"Quite right, Lusya! My fingers are absolutely numb."

"You need brains—not fingers—for listening to lectures," said Nina Fokina, a stocky, broad-faced girl in horn-rimmed glasses.

"Very wise! Unfortunately we can't all be geniuses like you!"

"Take Kozelsky," said Voronkova. "His isn't a special cycle, just the general course, but it's all quite clear and definite!"

"All pre-digested, eh?" interrupted Nina. "As if one could compare Ivan Antonovich and Kozelsky!"

"But the exams—what about the exams?"

"You're all wrong, girls!" said Lena. "We're not at school any more, are we? Pushkin was born in 1799 and died in 1837. He had a nurse, he went to the lyceum, and so on. . . . Ivan Antonovich takes it for granted that we're sufficiently up in Pushkin's biography and works. He talks to us as if we were his colleagues."

"What's all the chatter about?" said Sergei. "If you can't understand Krechetov it's your fault, not his. Why should the whole class be slowed down?"

"Of course," said Vadim.

A bell was sounded . . . and Krechetov entered the room with a group of students, continuing a conversation with them which had begun in the corridor.

"You shut up, Vadim," cried Lusya, running back to her place. "Of course you would back up Lena!"

Vadim frowned, reddened, muttered something inarticulate about "gossiping tongues," and took his seat.

A winter morning can be as dark as night, and the lights in the lecture hall were often only switched off after the second break, when it got lighter out-of-doors.

*I? I summoned you, and glad I am to see you! . . .
I die—this is the end! O! Donna Anna!*

(Sinks into the earth.)

Vadim had often read Pushkin's tragedy in his childhood, and had reread it quite recently, and the closing words: "Sinks into the earth" had always sounded strange and unexpected in his ears. But now he suddenly realized the profound significance of this ending. Don Juan "sank into the earth" because he had loved for the first time in his life. And he—the fortunate one, the hero of innumerable easy conquests—had no claim to simple happiness. He had to die. Vadim imagined himself in the place of Don Juan. He could even see his own face—pale, distorted with mortal pangs—at the moment when his hand was pressed by the stone hand of the Knight Commander. The Don Juan who had ever been fearless and smiling in the face of death, must now tremble for his life. . . . What a sad and solitary life! And there would be no one to see its end. Not even Donna Anna, for she, it seems, had fainted. . . .

Lena took occasional notes. Her face was invisible, but the white bow, so crisp, the only one in the whole hall, reflected the chill blue of the windowpanes. "Pushkin's Don Juan is a man tossed by passion, not the intriguing seducer Molière makes him. . . ." What was she thinking about? How calmly her round elbows rested on the table. . . . Now she was dipping her pen in the ink, removing a hair from the nib, wiping her fingers on the blotting paper. Surely she must be thinking about *something*.

Vadim held Lena's satchel while she put on her overshoes and cap. Then he helped her on with her coat. Her face was flushed from bending over so long.

"Thank you," she said, drawing on her gloves and smoothing them conscientiously. "Look at that—splitting already!"

"Your gloves?" asked Vadim.

"Yes! Dad bought them for me, they're absolutely no good. You men simply don't know how to buy things!"

Lena struck Vadim playfully with a glove, and said in mock-didactic tones: "When you marry, never buy your wife anything yourself! Only sweets and theatre tickets."

"Very good, Ma'am!" said Vadim, saluting and glaring in front of him. "But who will she have to scold if a purchase turns out badly? It will be a great inconvenience for her, you know!"

Vadim was embarrassed by the flippant tone their conversation had assumed. It created a distance between himself and Lena, and he wanted to talk to her seriously. For some reason or other it had become the thing to adopt a flirtatious tone when talking to girls, but Vadim had never been good at it. And when he used it with Lena it sounded particularly false and vulgar. As they passed through the gate he said:

"There's a new film out today. The papers praise it. By the way, the scenario was done by—"

"I know," said Lena. "I saw it at the preview, in the House of the Cinema."

They walked on in silence. Then he said, in utter desperation:

"I haven't been to the Pushkin Museum for ages. . . ."

"Nor have I," said Lena.

"We were told to go there by the lecturer on the Renaissance. . . ."

"I'd go with pleasure, Vadim, but today I'm busy. I can't."

"Busy!" he repeated mechanically, unable to think of anything else to say.

"My head aches rather," said Lena, sighing languidly. "It was awfully hot in the hall. . . ."

Vadim laughed.

"You saw it at a preview. You're busy today. Your head aches, and . . . it was awfully hot in the hall."

"Well, what of it? Why do you echo everything I say?"

"I have a passion for analysis, you know."

"Stupid!" Lena shrugged her shoulders. "It's stupid of you to take offence. . . . I'm busy today--let's go on Saturday. Will Saturday suit you?"

Her candid, light-brown eyes grew suddenly grave, for a moment almost alarmed. He looked into them, appeased, ready to forgive all for that single moment. Here was something no words could achieve.

"All right, then?" said Lena, insistently, and she touched his arm.

"All right," he said, smiling. "Incidentally, it's a good thing—if we'd gone to the cinema I wouldn't have had the price of my dinner left. I took very little money with me."

The rush hour in the dining room is usually the moment when the first and second shifts change. There is always a cheerful crush, and appetizing kitchen smells. . . . A jolly dinnery noise, with waitresses running to and fro, snatches of conversation—about the winter exams which are drawing so near, a boxing match, Fedin's latest book, New Year parties, the Kuril Islands, the *drosophila* fly, love and rissoles.

In the hubbub of voices, the loud sounds of Russian were interspersed with the softer Ukrainian accent, and the throaty laughter and voices of Caucasians. At one table there was a group of young Albanians—freshmen. They were discussing something gaily, talking very quickly and all together, and it seemed a wonder that

they could understand one another. Then a Russian girl-student went and sat down beside them, and the voices of the Albanians were instantly lowered—they pronounced Russian words conscientiously and slowly, helping one another out, and laughing more than they spoke.

Vadim and Sergei entered the dining room together, as usual. They seated themselves at Krechetov's table. Beside the professor sat Se Li Bon, a lean grave-faced young Korean in his second year. He had finished his dinner and was sitting talking to Krechetov, a pile of books on his knees. When he saw Vadim and Sergei, he got up hastily.

"Sit down, comrades, I've finished," he said, with a courteous smile. "Good-bye, please!"

"Fine chap, that Li Bon," said Krechetov, looking after him. "You remember, last year he didn't know a word of Russian. And now he's reading Pushkin and Gorky. His determination is something remarkable. He's just read *Poltava*, and now he's asking me about Peter and Mazeppa. 'We have a Mazeppa too,' he says. 'Syngman Rhee, but we'll throw him into the sea, like a dog. He's a traitor to the people.' And you should have heard how fiercely he said it!"

Ivan Antonovich turned to Sergei.

"How's your paper on Heine getting on?"

Sergei said his paper was getting on splendidly, and would be ready in a fortnight. He was terribly pressed for time, but the paper would be ready. He said this so gravely and with such conviction that Vadim was astonished, remembering that Sergei had told him not long ago that he hadn't begun the work, and felt not the slightest desire to do so.

"Mind you have it ready before the examinations begin, Palavin," said Krechetov. "'Heine and Fascism,' it's an important subject, a philosophical one, I should say. Do you consult Nina Arkadyevna? Note Heine's words on America in *Ludwig Börne*—he speaks of race prejudice

in that 'accursed land.' Be sure you find the place. But above all, be bold, generalize, don't get bogged up in trifles. That's the misfortune of beginners—you get drowned in details, all sorts of rubbishy memoirs, anecdotes. That invariably leads one astray. Stick to the main line. You'll do well—I believe in you!"

He smote Sergei approvingly on the shoulder. "Well, I'll leave you, young men! There's a Chair meeting at three, I'm late as it is. How are you getting on with your paper, Belov?"

"I don't think I shall be in time for the New Year," said Vadim.

"Why not?"

"I can't manage it, Ivan Antonovich."

"You can't? What a pity! I was counting on you. Well, we'll talk it over another time."

Ivan Antonovich raised a threatening forefinger, picked up his brief case, and made for the exit. His brief case was always so full that it could not be closed, and Ivan Antonovich had to hold it under his arm.

"Why shouldn't you be ready, after all?" asked Sergei.

"I work slowly, you know that."

Yes, he worked slowly, stubbornly, painstakingly, gradually getting a firm grip on his material, and knew no other way of working. He said he was slow on the uptake; he considered his style and method ponderous, tedious, commonplace, and was convinced that he would never acquire lightness in handling words, brilliancy in argument, would never display unexpected wit—all those qualities that distinguished Sergei.

But what Vadim had said was not the whole truth, either. During the past week he had worked more slowly than ever, he had almost come to a standstill. He had been thinking too much about Lena. The moment he was alone and sat down to work, he began thinking about her. If he did not meet her in the Institute every day it

might be easier for him. Even now he missed something which Sergei, swallowing his soup noisily, was eagerly telling him, and all because he was thinking about Lena....

Andrei Sirikh, a heavy, broad-shouldered, shy-looking youth in spectacles, approached the table. He held a glass of stewed fruit in his hand.

"Isn't it hot?" he said, sitting down and removing his sweat-dimmed glasses. Without them his face became altogether boyish and mild. "It's simply unbearable!"

"You shouldn't eat so much," said Sergei. "You need to reduce. You're outrageously fat."

"Me fat? I like that!" said Andrei, laughing good-naturedly. Bending over his glass, he extended his right arm. "Feel that—d'you call that fat?"

"You're too fleshy anyhow. That's why you're unlucky in love—isn't it, Vadim? A fellow ought to be sinewy."

"That's true. I have no luck."

"Get rid of your extra weight. When boxers are unlucky they lose flesh and go into another class. What makes you unlucky?"

"I don't know myself—I suppose it's because I never have any time." Andrei finished up his stewed fruit and wiped his lips with a paper napkin. "I'm just unlucky," he continued, looking at Sergei and smiling. "In the first place I live out of town, and have to spend three hours on the way. Then there are those circles, the Student Research Society... and now they've got hold of me for the electioneering campaign. So you see, I'm just unlucky."

"You're a nice chap," said Sergei thoughtfully. "You're like Dymov in the Chekhov story, you know. A good simple chap, and as wholesome as cod-liver oil. You are, aren't you?"

"And as nasty as cod-liver oil?"

"I wish my cousin had a husband like you. I haven't got a sister, unfortunately."

"You're in a waggish mood today," said Andrei, smiling. "Whence all this jollity?"

Suddenly Alexei Remeshkov, a lanky, curly-headed lad, in his third year, high-spirited and keen-witted, appeared at the table.

"Didn't you know?" he exclaimed, turning swiftly to Andrei. "He's writing a novel! A novel!"

"A novel?"

"A novel! Some say it's talented and epoch-making And some say its epoch-making and talented. Violent arguments are raging round it. And he just goes on writing, writing A novel!" And Alexei began shouting at the top of his voice. "Palavin is writing a novel! Palavin's novel! Ready for the press!"

People began looking round curiously from the neighbouring tables. From the distance a voice cried:

"Hi there! Who's writing a novel?"

"Palavin, P for Pushkin, A for Aligher, L for Ler-montov. . . ."

"That'll do, damn you!" laughed Sergei, clutching at Alexei's sleeve. "Shut up, can't you?"

Andrei got up and excused himself. He, too, it appeared, had been summoned to the Chair meeting. Heavy and broad-shouldered, he picked his way carefully among the closely packed tables, afraid of knocking against somebody by accident, sticking out his elbows as people overconscious of their strength are apt to do. Sergei screwed up his eyes and looked after him.

"He's like my aunt's chest of drawers," said Sergei suddenly. "Always silent, always tightly locked. And nobody knows what's going on there behind those spectacles. My aunt's chest of drawers is just as bulky and ponderous. . . . I never saw it open, and when I was a child I used to think there must be wonder in it, marvellous things. But perhaps, after all, there wasn't anything in it. Just empty drawers and a few old rags. . . . Eh?"

They had finished their dinner and Vadim got up.

"Coming?"

"All right. Wait just a minute! Not so bad, that about the chest of drawers, eh? I must. . ." Taking out his notebook, Sergei rapidly scribbled in it. "It'll come in handy. I make a note of everything now. If you don't make notes you forget a lot of things," he said earnestly. "Late-ly I've learned to see everything quite differently. Have you noticed how the top of our waiter's head shines? You haven't? It came to me in a flash: 'His bald pate was the one bright spot in his life.' How's that? That's imagery, you know. Like it, Vadim?"

"Not bad," said Vadim.

The dining room was in a building opposite the Institute, just across the street. As they put on their hats and coats in the vestibule, and walked past the empty benches of the naked square in front of the Institute, Sergei talked incessantly all about metaphors and images that came into his head, saying how hard it was to write, but how fascinating the work was. But he still said nothing about the subject of his novel. "You'll find out when I read it to you." Two days before he had given up smoking cigarettes and taken to a beautiful pipe with an amber mouthpiece.

Vadim listened to him absently. He kept telling himself that there was nothing remarkable in the fact that Lena was busy today. She always worked a lot, grinding away sometimes for days on end. Besides, she had her "vocal study." Oh, yes, her "vocal study." For a long time this expression had seemed to him ridiculously high-flown; he had teased Lena with it, and she had resented it. "You and your silly jokes! Everybody calls it that in musical circles." However that might have been, "vocal study" took time. It was not everyone who could find time to study, to do social work, and at the same time go in for "vocal study." She was a good girl! But that horrible

word "busy." And what a long time to wait till Saturday! Three whole days!

Yet, although Vadim had gone so thoroughly into Lena's reasons for being busy, he was left with a feeling of vexation over a lost day. And all because he had been in such a hurry to make plans for the day, and his plans had collapsed. It wasn't anybody's fault. After all, what had collapsed? It was just that he had lived in expectation of being with her and now he had to settle down to something different. The best thing would be to go home and peg away at *Capital*. The most difficult subject this term was political economy. He ought to sit down today and make a précis of a chapter or two. This very moment, not putting it off till the evening. . . . But Lena had her "vocal study" on Wednesdays and Mondays, and today was Tuesday, wasn't it?

When Vadim and Sergei came out of the square on to the boulevard, a voice hailed them. It was Nina Fokina, who was running after them, waving violently

"Sergei, wait for me!"

Vadim and Sergei stopped.

"Sergei, have you got my work with you?" asked Nina, panting. Her broad freckled face was flushed from running, and her spectacles had slipped down her nose.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Sergei. "Wipe your optics, they're sweating."

"I should like to have tomorrow's discussion postponed. I gave my stuff to Andrei to read, and he made some comments, very important ones. He even promised to help me develop the theme of the place of the individual in socialist society. I've hardly touched on it, and it's such an important one, especially since I'm working on Panova, that it simply can't be passed over. He's absolutely right. And he said he'd give me some more material, some literary criticism I've never seen. So give me back my work and I'll go over it again."

"I haven't got it with me," said Sergei. "And anyhow I don't think that's the way. . . ."

"What isn't?"

"I mean taking work back to go over it again after you've handed it in, and having discussions put off. What's the matter? Are you afraid of criticism?"

"Not a bit! Real criticism is exactly what I want. But why should I bring up for discussion work that no longer satisfies me? If I can see my mistakes and the way to correct them, why shouldn't I do so before discussion?"

"Because you'll be breaking up the meeting, that's why!" said Sergei irritably. "I've read and thought about your work, I've outlined my own speech, spent a lot of time, and is all that to go for nothing? People are coming . . . everyone knows about it and has prepared for it. Why can't the meeting go on, and the criticism be heard, and then you go over your work again?"

"I don't want it to be that way! I'm to meet Andrei on Thursday and spend the evening over it, and I'll have it ready by next week. Can't some other paper be discussed tomorrow? . . ."

"Where's it coming from?"

Nina fell silent, upset by Sergei's unsympathetic attitude.

"Why work yourself up?" said Vadim, looking at his friend in astonishment. "Nina's quite right if she wants to take her work back and improve it. There's nothing terrible in that."

"Oh, very well! Do as you like! But I won't have anything to do with it another time."

"I don't think that's right."

"Allow me to know best, Vadim!"

"All right," said Nina, after a pause. "If you feel you've been wasting your time on me, I apologize. Don't forget to bring it tomorrow, though. Good-bye!"

Sergei walked on, frowning at the ground beneath his feet and kicking at a pebble. Suddenly he swung his foot violently backwards and sent the pebble flying.

"The idiot! She's upset all my plans!"

"What on earth has she upset?" said Vadim in still greater astonishment.

"I'll tell you what! Look! I was going to speak not only about her paper, but about all our work. Her paper was just what I needed to illustrate my ideas about the complete lack of ideas. See? Besides, I'm sure she won't make any essential changes. She'll just spread it out over another ten pages. She's simply in a funk And in steps Andrei, the benefactor! Ugh!"

Sergei sighed and made a gesture of utter despair "Student Research Society indeed! All they do is add bits to each other's work, a patch here, a patch there. ."

"I don't know what you mean Andrei undertakes to help her."

"Oh, of course! It's the only way we know," Sergei interrupted scornfully. "We've got into the habit of copying from one another—English exercises, lecture notes, everything! And now we're to do research work for each other. . . ."

"Hold on a moment! You know you don't mean that," said Vadim, beginning to get angry. "You're talking through your hat."

"I have no objection to people helping one another, but it should come at the right time. At the right time, I say."

Sergei's voice was harsh and nasal, as it often was in his sudden spurts of irritation.

"I should think you hadn't any objection!"

"I object to cramming—see? Cramming!"

"And what do you call cramming? You don't know yourself what it is you object to! It's simply that you've

set your heart on shining tomorrow, and now you won't be able to."

"We'll see about that."

"It's not a matter of speeches, Sergei, or of crushing people. I'd like to see what you'd say if you were forced to produce work which you yourself considered unfinished!"

They argued long, passing one bus stop after another, and quite forgetting they had intended to take a trolley bus. Sergei gradually gave in, and at last declared: perhaps he was in the wrong, crying for the moon, but he did want the S.R.S. to be really scientific. Of course, he had overdone it with Nina, he should not have been rude. His temper was awful, damn it, his nerves. . . . He was annoyed, of course, at the change in the program for tomorrow, but he would speak anyhow.

Vadim heard him out in silence, gratified to see that Sergei had been somewhat disconcerted by his unexpected resistance, and that, shamefaced, he was now trying to change the subject.

After a short silence Sergei said, sighing, and pulling at his pipe:

"Whatever you say, Andrei really is a locked chest of drawers. He's an extraordinarily able student. Remember when he sat for the History of Grammar? The old man was simply staggered."

"I remember. You nearly got plucked."

"Well, I can't bear dogmatism, you know. Still, I got a 'four,' didn't I? And I never opened a book. But Andrei—he's a bore, anyway!"

"That's certainly untrue."

"Yes, he is. Don't argue. It's becoming a habit with you. Andrei's a bore because he does everything with equal conscientiousness. He has no special subject, nothing of his own. He simply studies. He enjoys the mere process. And he's mediocre, and don't you say he isn't."

Oh yes, he knows what other people say and write, but try and get him to use his own brains. . . . He's simply a sound-recording apparatus. He's a born compiler."

"What makes you attack him all of a sudden?" asked Vadim in astonishment.

"You argue, and I try to prove my point. I have nothing against him. He's a good lad, kind, honest, but—a bore. And he's a bore, too, because he talks so little. And nobody knows whether it's because he doesn't understand, or just has nothing to say."

"It's simply that he never talks about himself."

"That's no argument."

"No, my dear Cakes, he's the cleverest of us all, and you just. . . . Aren't you perhaps jealous of this bore? Is that it?"

"Me? Jealous?" Sergei burst out laughing. "I like that! Why should I be jealous of him? For sitting over his thick calico-bound notebooks all day? For wasting his life in libraries? I have other methods of study, and I greatly doubt if he knows more than I do. Me jealous! That's a good one! I simply said Andrei was a bore. I could never become close friends with him; in two days I should be yawning my head off."

He fell silent again, but, after a couple of puffs, went on:

"The worst thing in friendship is for a man to become a bore. That's a rust which can never be removed."

"Write that down," said Vadim, laughing.

They came out on to the square. Pushkin's statue was grey with hoarfrost. But the snow had not yet begun to fall, and the ground was dry and hard as stone. Sergei rapped his pipe against an iron lamppost and put it in his pocket.

"'Autumn lingered long that year'," he quoted, looking up at the monument. "Beastly weather! You're a queer chap, Vadim! Me jealous—of all things! Yes, you're a

queer chap! I'm as fond of Andrei as any of us are. Everyone's fond of him. And, by the way, it's a bad sign when everyone loves a person."

"Another aphorism. Write it down."

"I'm uncompromising, Vadim," Sergei went on heatedly. "I can't stand the commonplace, the golden mean. And I don't believe in angels. We'll see who goes further—Andrei, sinless as St. Cecilia, or me, with my multitude of defects."

"Which, by the way, you by no means consider to be such."

"We'll go into that when all accounts are settled, shall we?"

"When? In forty years' time?"

"A little sooner, perhaps. Perhaps this very winter."

"When you've finished your novel? Is that what you mean?"

Sergei made no reply, only shaking his head and smiling, as if to say: "You understand nothing, old fellow, and apparently it's no use trying to explain." At the next stop they both waited for the tram.

"I should like you to drop in one day and hear a few extracts."

"I will. I'm extremely interested," said Vadim gravely.

Sergei called after him from the steps of the tram:

"I shall speak tomorrow and go away immediately, and the rest of you can do as you like."

Chapter 5

The Student Research Society of the Literature Department had been founded early in the year. Its elected president was Fyodor Kaplin, a senior student, one of those well-informed and well-read youths who are called "professors" while still at school, and are regarded as future postgraduates in their first year at the Univer-

sity. The head of the S.R.S. was Professor Kozelsky, lecturer on 19th-Century Russian Literature.

The students flocked to the Research Society, and Vadim was one of the first to join. He was glad of the opportunity to try his hand at independent research, although by no means attracted to scientific work, for he was preparing himself for a life of practical activities.

Long ago, in his school days, Vadim had studied all sorts of scientific subjects on his own initiative—geology, astronomy, paleontology. He had even written “scientific works”—on volcanoes, on extinct reptiles—for which purpose he had ruthlessly cut pictures out of old encyclopedias and glued them into his exercise books. These “works” were discussed at all sorts of juvenile study circles and sent to school exhibitions, and Vadim had been proud of them, firmly regarding himself, at thirteen, as a future scientist. But now it seemed to him that to be a real research worker required a multiplicity of the most varied gifts, which a slow-witted person like himself could never dream of.

And yet Vadim joined the S.R.S. and determined to work seriously. His wartime experiences had taught him to value simple things such as peace, work and books, and to be thorough and conscientious in all his undertakings, regarding them as a basis for his future profession.

Vadim had frequent arguments with Sergei, who insisted that teaching was for those with limited creative abilities. “You mustn’t be a teacher,” he would say. “With your maddening perseverance, with your memory, you’re cut out for a learned profession. You simply must go in for research.” He never had the slightest doubt about himself—he was going in for research. These conversations infuriated Vadim. “Then why did you come to our Institute?” he would ask.

“In the first place, to get an education, and in the second place, to follow it up with a postgraduate course.

It'll be easier to do that here than in the University. Considering the general level, you know. . . ."

Sergei Palavin was certainly seen to advantage on the background of "the general level." He quickly earned the respect of the professors by his learning and his ability to take examinations with calm self-confidence, with none of a student's awkwardness. Such ability always makes an impression upon examiners.

Sergei took an active part in the work of the S.R.S. from its very beginning. He was proposed for the post of president along with Kaplin, and the latter had been preferred only because he was already in his fourth year and had several study papers to his credit, whereas Sergei had no such work to show for his third year.

Two months later, however, Sergei suddenly became sick of the society, and began skipping meetings and speaking about them in derogatory terms. Vadim thought he understood the cause of this change. Sergei's vanity had suffered two shocks—the election of Kaplin, and, later, a paper read by Andrei Sirikh, which earned general approval. Sergei had submitted at the same time a short paper on Griboyedov, a superficial and hasty work which had attracted no attention whatever.

And now Sergei was talking about the necessity for reorganization, hinting at pedantry, amateurishness, ballast and so on. Perhaps there was something in his criticism. But Vadim believed that all these defects sprang from one major defect: poor leadership. Professor Kozelsky had so far been unable to make the society a rallying point for serious creative work on the part of the students. And would he ever succeed in doing this? Lately Vadim had begun to feel more and more doubtful.

The meeting of the S.R.S. was held in the large lecture room reserved for first-year students. Vadim and Sergei entered together.

"Let's go in front, next to the window," said Sergei, pulling Vadim forward by the arm. "I want to see everyone," he added in lowered tones.

Today he intended to speak. Vadim and Sergei sat down next to the window beside Pyotr Lagodenko, a third-year student like themselves. He was a dark, stocky, austere-looking individual wearing naval trousers and jacket. Lagodenko, though not a member of the society, had begun attending its meetings of late and often took part in discussions. Right in front of them, seated behind the long table, was the severe, imposing figure of Fyodor Kaplin, clean-shaven, round-faced, with sloping shoulders. He was busy writing something, and never once raised his head. Lena, too, was here today—as a visitor—sitting behind with some girls. Vadim could hear her voice—even her whisper—from behind him. She whispered something to Nina Fokina, and then he heard her laugh. He did not look round, but he was glad Lena was here, even though she was so far away from him and they would probably not exchange a single word throughout the evening. There was a buzz of conversation in the hall till Kozelsky came in.

Professor Boris Matveyevich Kozelsky looked comparatively young for his fifty-odd years. He was tall, brisk in his movements, held his head, with the smoothly brushed, white hair, proudly, his chin jutting out, and seemed to look down on all, even on those who were taller than himself. His complexion was invariably fresh and pink—Professor Kozelsky was a sportsman—he played tennis.

In his first year Vadim had been impressed by the tall, grey-haired man with the athletic carriage, always smoking a pipe and smelling of "Golden Fleece" tobacco. Kozelsky did not lecture at the beginning of the first year, and Vadim could only observe him from afar, or when they met in the corridors. He began lecturing in the fourth term,

and at first Vadim was still impressed—chiefly by his extraordinary memory and erudition. Kozelsky never used notes, and the only object on his reading desk was an ash tray. Sometimes he would quote whole pages of prose by heart.

But the more Vadim came to know Professor Kozelsky, the less he liked him. Academic erudition, unrelieved by lively, witty ideas, and not lit up by an inquiring mind, can be most irritating, almost intolerable. Vadim soon discovered that it was by no means easy to pass Kozelsky's examinations. Kozelsky questioned closely, required exact adherence to his definitions, and did not like independent opinions, arguments, questions. In fact, he objected to noise of any sort. He was a quiet man himself, and never so much as raised his voice.

As he came into the hall Kozelsky greeted everyone with a nod, and proceeded rapidly to the reading desk. Fyodor Kaplin leaped from his seat immediately, and, bending an anxious face over the professor's shoulder, began speaking to him in a low voice. Kozelsky heard him with brows raised in astonishment.

"Fokina!" he said quietly. "It seems your paper is not ready!"

"No, it isn't," said Nina, standing up. "I'm sorry, Boris Matveyevich, I've decided to go on working at it. I'll submit it next week."

"I see. Well—you are within your rights," agreed Kozelsky benevolently, and Vadim thought he was even glad—the meeting would be over sooner. "You're within your rights," repeated Kozelsky absently, filling his pipe. "Very well—we'll wait a week. Your paper is on the works of Karavayeva, isn't it?"

"On the novels of Vera Panova, Boris Matveyevich."

"Oh, yes, so it is! By way of a critical article, I suppose? Well, there'll always be time to hear it and discuss it, there'll be no difficulty about that."

Sergei, who had been fidgeting in his seat and hurriedly making notes in pencil, at last asked permission to speak. He spoke from the floor, half turning towards his hearers.

"Comrades, owing to Fokina our usual meeting will not be held. And this may be all for the best. It's high time for us to discuss our work seriously. In my opinion, comrades..." Sergei glanced at his notebook, closed it vigorously, and threw it negligently on the desk in front of him. "I consider that our work has so far been very poor. And why? There are many reasons. We have no unified plan, drawn up in conformity with the lecture program of the Chair. We must have a plan. As it is, our work is so unsystematic that nothing on earth—excuse me if I'm too plain-spoken, comrades—will ever come of it. Look how lightly we treat the subjects offered for discussion. One comrade, for instance, undertook to write about Ulrich von Hutten, and after two weeks' work in the library, he declared: 'I'm sick of von Hutten! Sick to death! I think I'll take—er—Mayakovsky.' Why do you laugh? It's not funny, comrades, it's sad. Another time, one of the girls undertook research work on Kuprin's *The Duel*. 'What made you choose *The Duel*?' I asked. 'There's a lot about love in it,' she said, 'besides it's nice and short.'"

There was laughter in the hall and a voice cried loudly:

"Name!"

"Never mind the name! I'm speaking of facts. Of course, these are isolated cases, but they show what such lack of system in our work leads to. And these cases also show that many persons have joined our society who have no place here. Yes, comrades, this is no scientific society, it's a kind of literary circle open to anyone who wishes to join. That's why we have so many amateurish papers—nothing but generalizations filched from textbooks, smoothly written articles without a single original

thought in them. Who needs this sort of thing, I ask you? To give another example: I was Fokina's critic, and I know her work on Panova's novels. True, the version I know has been scrapped by the author. But all the same I tell you frankly, Nina, you don't seem to realize it is research you're supposed to be doing, not writing a story for a kids' magazine. And this applies to many other comrades, not only to Fokina. That's about all I have to say, except that if the situation in the society does not change, I personally shall lose all interest in its work. It's simply a waste of time. And we students haven't got much time to spare."

Sergei sat down, thrusting his notebook into an inner pocket with a resolute air.

"And whose fault is it that such a situation exists?" asked Lagodenko in a deep bass, looking, not at Sergei, but towards the platform.

"Ours!" replied Sergei readily. "It's our own fault of course! And it is for us to put things right."

"Quite so, but..." muttered Lagodenko.

"Do you want to speak, Lagodenko?" asked Kaplin sternly.

"Not yet..."

Turning to Sergei, Vadim said, under his breath:

"It's not only *our* fault. What about Kozelsky? He's our instructor, it's for him to make things interesting."

"No, no!" whispered Sergei, frowning in vexation. "Well, of course, to a certain extent it is, of course... Boris Matveyevich is too easygoing—he's ready to let the whole Institute join the society. And what we need just now is to clear out about half the members."

"Well, then, what do you propose, Palavin?" asked Kaplin.

"I propose cutting down the membership of the society to half. Quality before quantity. There are many who are not up to research work and they are keeping the others

back, and that is what makes our meetings so uninteresting, so . . . feeble! I hope my comrades will not misunderstand me. . . .”

“We understand you very well!” said Lagodenko.

There was a hubbub, many people speaking at once:

“What does he want—a society for the elect?”

“He’s quite right! There are too many members.”

“The more the merrier!”

“Rubbish, it isn’t numbers that count!”

“And who’s to do the weeding out? Palavin?”

“Fyodor, let me speak!” said Lagodenko, standing up. Everyone fell silent, simply because no one else could possibly make himself heard when Lagodenko spoke.

“In Palavin’s speech we have had what I call the usual Palaverer’s approach. Sh! No laughing, please! He’s right in saying that work is not conducted in our society with the necessary seriousness, that it is unmethodical and not particularly interesting. That’s a fact. But he is wrong in saying that this is because there are too many people in it. Nonsense—that’s not the point! The point is . . .” here Lagodenko coughed resoundingly, squared his shoulders, and thrust his hands into his broad, buckled belt, “. . . the point is that the leading spirits of the society—both our revered Boris Matveyevich and our respected Fyodor, take very little real interest in our work. I say ‘our,’ because, although I haven’t yet joined the society, I am thinking of doing so, and this matter touches me closely. Subjects for discussion are not merely chosen at random, unsystematically—they are chosen on the wrong principle. By this I mean that they are too academic and have very little to do with present-day reality. And that’s the root of the whole trouble. Surely it is the task of an organizer to suggest themes to the students!”

Lagodenko spoke in his usual dogged, self-assured, and even somewhat arrogant fashion. There was always

a didactic undercurrent to his speeches, and Vadim, who hated being lectured, resented his tone. Still, Lagodenko was more in the right than Sergei, and saw deeper into the essence of the matter. Fyodor Kaplin, though he knitted his thin, reddish brows, sighed, and kept clearing his throat to express his displeasure, heard Lagodenko out. As for Kozelsky, he seemed not to be listening to Lagodenko at all—he smoked his pipe imperturbably, his glance roving abstractedly over the audience, and then started turning over the pages of a magazine which happened to be lying on the table.

When Lagodenko had had his say, and noisily resumed his seat, Kozelsky at last got up to speak. He spoke as if he had really heard nothing but Palavin's speech. But Lagodenko did not seem to be in the least disconcerted by this.

"I have only one addition to suggest to the fervent and helpful speech made by Sergei..." here Kozelsky checked himself, and added, smiling: "by our respected Comrade Palavin. With regard to the choice of subjects for discussion, I consider it would be a good thing if the following principle were observed: students should select subjects coinciding with those included in the History of Literature course. The paper submitted will be all the better for it and the student himself will profit, for in this way he will more easily assimilate the material heard at lectures. Do you agree?"

"It sounds reasonable, Boris Matveyevich," said Sergei, nodding gravely.

"It does, doesn't it? In that way research work will be, so to speak, the natural continuation of what is heard in the lecture hall."

"I have a question, Professor!" cried the indefatigable Lagodenko. "There is only one objection to what you say. And it is this: Not everyone is drawn to the material of the lectures being heard at the moment. I go to

lectures, for instance, on Ostromir's New Testament,* but what really interests me, is, say, Novikov-Priboi.** That is possible, isn't it? Unquestionably this sometimes happens. But according to you, only senior students will be able to write on Soviet literature, because lectures on Soviet literature are only given in the fourth year. . . ."

"Quite right, but excuse me," said Kozelsky rapidly, turning towards Lagodenko. "I should like to ask you, speaking *ab ovo*, you know: for what purpose are student research societies like ours organized in institutes? For the purpose of implanting a love of research in the students, and enriching their experience by independent work. If we devote all our energies to modern works our purpose will not be achieved."

"Why not?" asked Lagodenko in astonishment.

"Because, young man, the works of our contemporaries smell too strongly of printer's ink. No bibliographical material has as yet grown up around them, critics themselves are frequently led astray, and are mistaken as to their value. How much more difficult, then, for you to judge."

"Good! It'll be all the more interesting for being difficult," said Lagodenko. "We are chiefly interested in our own literature. I suppose you realize that?"

"And I am chiefly interested in training you for research work," said Kozelsky, his voice rising almost imperceptibly, "in giving you knowledge. That is my task—to give you knowledge. You can amuse yourself philosophizing at other times, in other places, but when you come to me, kindly learn! I am making teachers and research workers of you, and not windbags. Do you understand

* The Ostromir New Testament—A New Testament copied and revised in 1056-1057 by Deacon Gregori for Ostromir, Mayor of the city of Novgorod. (Texts from the four Gospels were combined in alternation for Scripture readings during the church service.)—*Ed.*

** A. S. Novikov-Priboi (1877-1914)—well-known Soviet writer.—*Tr.*

what I mean, Lagodenko? Now don't try to trip me up, try to understand me: some of you have beards, and, for all I know, children, but you're still students, you've still got to learn. And we must learn from the classics, around which volumes of criticism have accumulated, innumerable opinions have clashed, discussion has thundered. You must learn to sift all this material and draw your own, independent conclusions, and while doing this you will be acquiring actual knowledge, supplementing your store of information. This is tedious work, but important nevertheless. I don't need superficial essays, based upon nothing but the barest of ideas, and sometimes not even ideas, but merely a groping for an idea, and with no factual knowledge to back it up. Be so good as to spare me this sort of thing. A journalist can be trained in a month—it takes years to make a research worker." Kozelsky paused for a moment, smoothed his hair, which was slick enough as it was, sighed, and said softly but with feeling: "Research is labour—intensive, daily labour. Whoever cannot, or will not, understand this will never accomplish anything worth while."

"He's a humbug, just the same," said Vadim to himself, regarding Kozelsky with distaste. "He a research worker? He's just playing at it, everything in him is for show. His noble gestures, his pipe, his distinguished grey locks, his knowledge—he even shows off his knowledge. He arrays himself in knowledge as he does in that knitted waistcoat of his, with the red bone buttons. . . ."

"Very good! You're right, of course!" said Lagodenko, and now Vadim liked his self-assured tone, his uncompromising attitude, his bluntness. "But don't you consider Soviet literary criticism a science, Professor?"

"What makes you think that?" asked Kozelsky, frowning. "Who told you I don't? You're fond of distorting the facts, and that's not to be tolerated. I repeat: I heartily welcome research on modern works, but consider that you

are not as yet competent to do anything serious along such lines."

"Professor, you. . ."

"That'll do, Lagodenko!" exclaimed Kaplin, leaping to his feet and blushing violently. "If you want to argue, ask for the floor. We don't want any haggling here. Do you realize who you're arguing with?"

Kozelsky calmly stuck the stem of his pipe between his teeth and gazed steadily at Lagodenko. Suddenly he said, speaking still more quietly and evenly than usual:

"By the way, Lagodenko, how is it you attend the meetings of the Student Research Society? It seems to me you have other things to do. No doubt you understand me."

Lagodenko lowered his eyes without answering. Everyone knew what Kozelsky meant: Lagodenko had failed in his second year, when sitting for his examination to Kozelsky at the end of the spring term, and had been allowed to pass to the third-year course provisionally. In October he had tried again, and again failed. The relations between himself and the professor, already strained, had lately become still worse.

Vadim was amazed at Lagodenko's perseverance, wondering how, considering everything, he could go on attending meetings, rise to speak so freely, with such authority, and actually argue with the professor.

"Do you intend to take your examination?" asked Kozelsky.

"You can be quite sure about that, Professor," said Lagodenko, speaking very distinctly. "You needn't worry—I'll take it next week."

"Good! It's you I worry about—not myself."

No decision was arrived at that day as to the reorganization of the society. Kozelsky spoke to the students another half-hour about their work on research papers, and then, glancing at his watch, made to go. He had already picked up his brief case and started for the door, when

he suddenly came to a halt and made a gesture of annoyance.

"I almost forgot! You quite put it out of my head!" he said, smiling, and stood his brief case on the table for a moment. "I have an announcement to make: I had a talk with the director yesterday about our society and he said he had received permission from the Ministry—" Kozelsky, paused expressively for a moment, and then declared triumphantly, pronouncing one word at a time: "for the publication of a separate volume of students' research work. Up to a hundred and fifty pages, comrades! That's quite a size. We shall only print the best papers, of course, the most interesting ones—so there'll be a wide field for competition."

The students, who had already begun to leave their seats, surrounded the professor, all talking at once.

"Boris Matveyevich, when is it to come out? At the end of the year?"

"Is it quite settled? Or is it just a promise?"

"How will it be printed?"

"Comrades! Comrades!" said Kozelsky, shaking his head gravely. "I don't make empty statements. It's quite settled. And it will be in regular book form, done in the printshop of one of the Moscow newspapers."

"Hurr-ay!" shouted Fyodor Kaplin in his enthusiasm, and, forgetful of his presidential decorum, leaped on to a chair and clapped his hands.

A few students shouted hurrah, and, suddenly seizing Kaplin, began to toss him into the air.

"Hey! What's that? Why me?" cried Fyodor, laughing and fighting them off. "Toss Boris Matveyevich—not me!"

Sergei, too, went up to Kozelsky, and asked him in businesslike tones:

"What will be the circulation?"

"Not very big, of course. Two or three hundred—no point in making it more. We shan't be selling it." Ko-

zelsky allowed himself a sly smile. "Excepting, of course, to relations or girl friends. . . ."

"Boris Matveyevich, who's going to choose the articles and do the editing?"

"Probably Ivan Antonovich Krechetov, Professor Krylov and myself. That is the plan, but of course it isn't necessarily final."

From the distance, Vadim followed the changes in Sergei's expression, which became more and more intent and absorbed. Thinking to tease his friend, he said loudly:

"Why should you be interested, Sergei? You're not likely to get into the journal."

"Why not?" asked Sergei.

"You said you were leaving the society."

"Yes, yes! So he did!" cried Kozelsky, laughing. "You're leaving us! It's because you can't spare the time, isn't it? A pity, but it can't be helped. . . ."

"Oh, no!" cried Sergei with a comical shake of his head. "You won't catch me leaving in a hurry now! Not if I know it!"

He laughed uproariously, and then, sobering down immediately, said, "of course, I didn't mean it literally. . . . And as for my criticisms—they still hold. You yourself agreed with me, Boris Matveyevich, didn't you?"

"To a certain extent. I'm in a hurry just now, comrades, we'll discuss the journal in detail at our next meeting. Good-bye, friends!"

"Good-bye, Boris Matveyevich!" answered several voices in chorus.

Kozelsky left, but most of the students remained in the hall. Everybody wanted to go on talking about the journal, to make guesses, suggestions. The news had been so unexpected and so welcome, that the hall was suddenly filled with noisy gaiety. Vadim looked at Lena who, surrounded by girls, was saying very loudly and vivaciously:

"It'll be grand, having our own publication—won't it? What a pity I'm not a member!"

"What's to prevent your joining?" asked Nina.

"Oh, no, Ninochka, I couldn't do that! I have my vocal study; I simply haven't got a moment. . . . What shall we call it? Our magazine must have a name, and it must be something original."

Sergei went up to Lagodenko, who was sitting at the table, smoking thoughtfully, and looking intently at the palm of his hand.

"It wasn't quite decent to attack the old man like that, Pyotr," said Sergei reproachfully. "You did distort the facts, you know."

"When did I?"

"You didn't understand him—or you wouldn't. He advised us to take subjects from the classics so as to get experience in literary criticism, you see. Then it'll be easier for us to work on our contemporaries. That's elementary. After all, what other motives could he have?"

Lagodenko was still examining his hand, turning it over and over, now separating the fingers, now gathering the tips together, and at last clenching his fist and bringing it heavily down on the table.

"What other motive? That's easy!" he said, narrowing his eyes and fixing a stubborn glance upon Palavin. "He cares nothing for Soviet literature. He just doesn't know it—never reads any."

"In the first place we have a special adviser for Soviet Literature—Lecturer Gorlinkov. And in the second place, that's not true—it's a downright lie. He takes in all the serious magazines. I've seen them in his home, so I know. Besides, how could a professor of Russian Literature. . . ."

"He takes them in, of course he does," interrupted Lagodenko. "He has to keep abreast of the times. But he chiefly reads reviews of books—it's less trouble."

"How d'you know that?"

"I do, that's all! Intuition, I suppose."

Lagodenko gave a sniff and ground out his cigarette. Jumping up, he stretched his firmly-knit, deep-chested frame till the joints cracked.

"Chirp, chirp!" he said. "Oh my, the journal! Oh my, Boris Matveyevich! And Boris Matveyevich has simply given us additional proof of his indifference to our affairs. Almost forgot to tell us the most important thing of all. A fine research adviser, I must say!"

A stat ly young woman in spectacles, with the face and bust of a marble caryatid, put in a word. It was Kamkova, a postgraduate student.

"I'd advise you, Lagodenko, to speak more respectfully of your professors. Such arrogance is not fitting in a third-year student."

"When you were in your third year at the Institute, my girl, I was in my last year at the front," said Lagodenko, measuring Kamkova with a contemptuous glance. "But that's not the point. What I mean is, I haven't the slightest desire to write the thousand-and-first work on Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, especially since I have so far nothing original to say about Ivan Sergeyevich. But I do want to use my brains on the new Soviet books, to try and see what is good in them, and what is bad. My work may not be very profound or striking as yet, but it will at least be sincere, and heading the right way—and useful. And the main thing is, it will interest me. Ever so much more than the thousand-and-first utterance on Bazarov* or Danil Zatochnik!"**

* Bazarov—hero of Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*.—*Tr.*

** Danil Zatochnik -the reference is to a work by Danil Zatochnik known under the various titles of "Prayer," "The Message," or "The Word." The date of its first appearance has been the subject of much discussion, and has been placed anywhere from the 11th to the 14th centuries.—*Tr.*

"Now you're going too far, Pyotr," said Nina.

"Better go too far than go back!"

"No, that's a dangerous, harmful point of view," said Fyodor Kaplin angrily, advancing upon Lagodenko. "What d'you mean by saying 'it will interest me'? It's not a matter of individual taste—this is a research society, not a delicatessen store. We've got to study, to work. A fine champion of Soviet literature! It's sheer demagoguery! Besides . . . you're not even a member; all you do is make trouble. We've had enough of that. We're not going to allow you to attack Boris Matveyevich, and . . . and upset everybody!"

"That's a bit thick, Fyodor. Pyotr isn't upsetting anyone," said Sergei in a conciliatory tone.

"It's time some people *were* upset," said Lagodenko with a smile.

"Join the society, then you can talk! You go on as if nobody was an authority for you—as if you were a superman. You've got to study—that's what!"

Sergei drew a deep breath and nodded thoughtfully.

"That's the chief thing, of course. And it's specially necessary for you, Pyotr, don't forget that. . . ."

Vadim noticed that Lagodenko's face suddenly clouded over. He seemed about to say something, but closed his lips, a muscle twitching in his cheeks. And Vadim felt embarrassed, as if the offensively condescending words had been addressed to himself.

"Why are you so down on him? Lecturing him all over the place?" cried Vadim, stepping defensively toward Lagodenko. "What's all this nagging about? After all, he's right on the whole. Kozelsky really is completely indifferent to our interests. Altogether he's a callous, indifferent person. His attitude to the S.R.S. is the same as his attitude to Soviet literature—secretly contemptuous. I'm absolutely certain of that. He's a formalist, a mere hoarder of knowledge—that's what he is!"

"Where do you get that from?" cried Fyodor indignantly. "What proof have you?"

Vadim was not particularly fond of getting involved in an argument, but once involved, was unable to keep cool, easily becoming roused and raising his voice. This time, too, he frowned and said heatedly:

"He doesn't consider Soviet literary criticism scholarly! And perhaps Soviet literature is a thousand times more complex than his beloved classics! Of course, it's easier working on the classics—the attitude to them has been more or less established, there are certain hallowed definitions—'opinions clashed, discussions raged'—and thank God it's over! One is on safe ground there! Whereas here you have to think for yourself, to argue, and you are apt to make mistakes. But the chief thing is that modern literature doesn't interest him. After all, he was brought up on the Russian classics."

"And what were we brought up on, you and I?" said Sergei.

"People can be brought up on all sorts of things," Vadim interrupted him harshly. "Soviet literature did not spring up in the void; it, too, is based on the Russian classics. There's no doubt about that. But it is based still more upon new ideas, communist ideas..."

The talk turned upon the latest Soviet novels. Their weak and strong points were discussed passionately, the smallest details were argued about till the arguers grew hoarse. Sergei and Kaplin fell upon Lagodenko.

"Come on, now, what's the basic distinction between socialist and critical realism?"

"Take Gorky, for instance..."

"No quotations—say it in your own words!"

"I see you mean to keep it up till midnight," said Lena suddenly. For a long time she had been sitting in silence, listening thoughtfully to the disputants. "It's time for me to go home."

She slung her leather handbag with the silver monogram "L. M." over her shoulder, and said good-bye. Vadim was longing to go straight out after her, but somehow he could not get up. He no longer took part in the arguments and, after staying on for a few unprofitable minutes, rose in a violent hurry, as if he had just remembered something he must do.

"I think I'll be going, it's getting late," he muttered, looking at the clock.

"You're half-gone anyway," said Nina, laughing.

Nobody but Vadim, who was much too embarrassed to answer, heard this remark. Sergei and Lagodenko shook hands with him absently.

He went into the corridor, pursued by Lagodenko's rumbling voice:

"...no proof? Very well, then! Li Bon, which of the Russian writers did you enjoy reading most? I mean when you were in your own country?"

Li Bon gave some inarticulate, excited answer in his reedy voice, and Lagodenko's triumphant bass cut across his words:

"You see! Soviet literature has become world literature, because the whole world wants to know what our life is like."

Vadim moved along the corridor, and the sound of Lagodenko's voice gradually subsided:

"And those are ordinary people, not formalists."

Vadim pushed open the door and ran out into the yard. Lena was nowhere to be seen. She must be a long way off by now—probably already in the bus.

The bare trees in the deserted square rustled softly in the wind. Vadim came to a stop at the railing. He would have liked to go back to the hall, where a dispute so full of interest to him was going on, but an absurd feeling of embarrassment restrained him, and he knew he was not going back.

"I'm behaving like a fool," he said to himself in vexation. "I must try to be more sensible. Anyhow, everyone knows. . . ."

The news of the journal enlivened the activities of the S.R.S. Sergei Palavin, too, had brightened up perceptibly. He no longer talked about leaving the society, but spoke at its meetings, and, as he himself put it, worked at his paper "like one possessed." Everyone wanted to be in the journal, Sergei most of all. The failure of his first paper, probably long forgotten by everyone else, still haunted him, and his vanity kept the memory alive.

Nina Fokina's paper was quite a success, and this spurred Sergei to still greater efforts. He did not attend the next meeting, telling Vadim that he would make his appearance as soon as his paper was ready.

But at the end of November he suddenly fell ill, having caught cold skating.

Chapter 6

Vadim was preparing a paper on the prose of Pushkin and Lermontov in the light of Belinsky's criticism. He had not written a line so far, and was rereading Pushkin and Lermontov, and other writers of the period—Karamzin, Marlinsky, Odoyevsky. The work as he had planned it was on such a big scale that it would hardly be ready by the spring, let alone the New Year. Vadim was in no hurry. He had no ambition to get into the first issue—indeed he was not particularly anxious to get into print at all. He worked methodically, without haste, deriving enormous satisfaction from his work.

But now the winter session and all sorts of preliminary examinations loomed ahead and Vadim was able to devote less and less time to his paper.

In the middle of December there was to be a preliminary examination in English. For Vadim this was a most trying and important one. He had not Sergei's happy gift for languages. What cost Sergei scarcely an effort, was for Vadim the fruit of hours of stiff memorizing and stubborn labour. Sergei carried about with him, to read in the bus, an English detective story three hundred pages long, while Vadim agonized over an "adapted" version of *Tom Sawyer*. Vadim invented all sorts of ruses for memorizing words, concocted a miniature dictionary in a notebook, which he kept always in his pocket and looked into whenever he got the chance, and made lists of words on loose sheets of paper—English on one side, Russian on the other. Gradually, all this brought results.

Olga Markovna, the teacher of English, respected Vadim for the one quality which language teachers respect above all in students—diligence. She was exacting towards Sergei. If he so much as made a slip in a preliminary test, or failed to learn some rule of grammar set for homework, Olga Markovna would pour out her wrath upon him. She scolded him in English, and very bitterly, and Sergei excused himself in English too, smiling and showing off his pronunciation. Very often nobody but themselves understood this exchange of courtesies, and that seemed to please Sergei mightily.

Taking her all round, Olga Markovna was a fair-minded, energetic, and ingenious teacher. She addressed her students exclusively "in the language," and had a knack of making each lesson seem new and interesting, and of avoiding stale repetitions. She arranged charades, literary "twenty questions," discussions on outstanding events in the life of the Institute, and on the latest Soviet publications and films. And she was herself during these hours invariably cheerful and humourous—avid of information and participating with youthful enthusiasm in the games and discussions.

But how she changed on examination days, or during "preliminaries"! On her good-natured face—she was a middle-aged woman, with powdered cheeks and a pointed nose—there appeared, from some unknown source, a ruthless expression of almost supercilious severity, an expression which had, in the words of Sergei, something "Robespierrean" in it. She quite lost her sense of humour, could no longer see a joke, and became the embodiment of the Latin saying: "*Fiat justitia ruat mundus.*"

The whole group, with the exception of Palavin and Sirikh, Fokina and a few other inveterate "top students," awaited the December test with the usual trepidation.

On the first Sunday in December, Vadim's group decided to visit the Tretyakov Gallery. About fifteen of them turned up, and were joined by a few students from other groups who lived in the same hostel. This was the first visit to the gallery for only one of the company, Rashid Nuraliyev, a young Uzbek who had entered the Institute that year.

Vadim had already made friends with this black-haired, swarthy youth, who had broad shoulders, and the powerful hands of a hereditary tiller of the soil. Vadim liked his high-cheekboned, cheerful, typical countenance, his invariable good humour, his smile displaying all his gleaming teeth, white and strong, like corn on the cob. Rashid wanted to know everything at once and in detail, and was never afraid of seeming ignorant or ridiculous, bombarding all and sundry with his questions, but never making himself tiresome. He had come to Moscow to learn, and he devoted himself conscientiously to learning, never wasting a moment.

Rashid Nuraliyev lived in the hostel, sharing a room with Lagodenko, Alyosha, and Max Vilkin, which was why

Vadim got to know him so soon. He already knew the whole story of Rashid's life. Rashid's father was a kolkhoz worker, and Rashid had been to school in the Yangi-Yul District, had worked as water-boy on the Ferghana Canal, and during the war had helped to build the North Tashkent Canal as leader of a team of diggers. Then he had entered the Komsomol. He had left a sweetheart behind him in the village, Rapikhe, the blacksmith's daughter.

"She's ever so young, and she's in the tenth grade!" said Rashid with pride. "And so beautiful! Such eyebrows! And so clever—oh, oh! She's ever so much cleverer than I."

Ivan Antonovich Krechetov accompanied the students. He walked arm-in-arm all the way with Andrei. Andrei was the professor's favourite. "The hope of the faculty," Ivan Antonovich jokingly called him.

As they walked along the broad pavement of the Kamenny Bridge, Krechetov told them about the artist, Polenov, whom he had known personally. Lena, who never left Ivan Antonovich's side, interrupted him every now and then, and Vadim, walking behind, listened to her laughter and animated voice ringing out in the cool air.

There was no wind, and it was a warm day for winter. The pale sky—one boundless cloud—stretched dome-like over the city, so that it seemed as if the earth received its light not from the sun, in its lofty hiding place, but from the transparent white sky, which was like a huge daylight lamp with a frosted globe. All colours were lost in this even light, leaving nothing but a half-tone wash, suffused with a smoky blue, against which some buildings showed a pale yellow, others a faint grey.

As far as the eye could see, the icy surface of the Moscow River gleamed dully. The only spot where it was not frozen was beside the Udarnik Cinema. Here the water

was black and dense. Jackdaws were circling and cawing above the cinema, and this excitement among the birds was the only thing which disturbed the unruffled stillness. Such stillness is a rare thing in Moscow, only to be met with between two and four o'clock on a quiet but rather frosty Sunday afternoon.

As they walked, Vadim talked to Rashid about Moscow—they were passing the Kremlin on the way to the Kadashevskaya Embankment. Vadim joyfully anticipated the pleasure it would be to lead Rashid through the labyrinth of halls, as familiar to him as his own home, to tell him about the painters, to watch his ecstatic pleasure. Just as, in his childhood, he had enjoyed showing his stamp album, or some particularly interesting books from his father's library, to his friends, so now he impatiently awaited the moment when he would be showing Rashid "his" picture gallery—the best in the world—with the paintings he loved so much, as if making ready to confer upon him an invaluable gift.

There it was—the narrow, unassuming passage sloping towards the granite embankment of the canal—Lavrushinsky Street, where the famous gallery stood.

As always on a Sunday, it was full of people, some hurrying towards it, others leaving it. A flock of little boys ran past, their boots clattering loudly on the pavement; a group of sailors strode down the middle of the road, overtaking the students. They were slowly followed by a car from some embassy, with a foreign flag in front.

The voice of Krechetov floated back to Vadim.

"...in 1892 the Tretyakov brothers presented the gallery to the city of Moscow. By that time it contained about a thousand canvases, hundreds of drawings, statues and tapestries—not a bad gift, was it? The whole collection was valued at one million three hundred thousand rubles. Pavel Mikhailovich Tretyakov was a remarkable man..."

The low red-and-white building with the Slavonic lettering on its façade came in sight. It was like some ancient Boyar palace. Every time Vadim entered the yard, he remembered his first visit there as a child, fifteen years earlier. The boundlessness of the life which he, a little boy, had suddenly discovered for himself, had fairly made his head swim.

After that he had often come here with Sergei. They used to vie with one another: who knew the most painters? Sergei always won—he was quicker and could remember names better. Vadim suddenly remembered the drawing teacher, Mark Aronovich—"Macaronich"—a funny old man, lachrymose and sentimental. He had a deafening bass voice, and was fond of giving vent to melodramatic exclamations. "You must feel art in your bones! If you don't feel a divine chill creeping down your spine when you look at Surikov, you're not human beings, but mere blocks of stone." In 1941 "Macaronich" had joined the People's Militia and lost his life near Yelnya.

"Get out your student cards!" shouted Lena, turning round.

"Cards? What for?" asked Rashid.

Vadim explained to him that students could get in for a third of the ordinary entrance fee. The cloakroom was swarming with visitors—grownups, military men, Young Pioneers. The bearded attendants, with their mild patriarchal faces, were kept busy receiving and returning coats.

When the students entered the first hall, they stopped, entranced, near the door. The very air seemed different here—seemed saturated with the past. Gradually they broke up into groups. Ivan Antonovich, Lena and Andrei remained behind, in the halls devoted to ancient Russian art. Alexei, Nina and Max Vilkin moved on.

Vadim and Rashid stopped in front of Vereshchagin's *Before the Attack on Plevna*.

"Plevna, that's Bulgaria," said Rashid. "My brother fought in Bulgaria—Djalal-aka. He was wounded—lost a leg."

Rashid peered earnestly into the faces of the Russian soldiers in the picture, who were lying on the ground in closed ranks in their dark-blue uniforms, their rolled-up greatcoats slung across their shoulders, their bayonets fixed. Only a few short hours—it might be minutes—remain until the signal for the attack. The darkness of the sky before dawn is ominous, and an ominous severity lies over all—the faces of the soldiers, their bowed shoulders, their caps pulled low over their eyes.... It is late autumn... one of the last attacks against Osman Pasha's fortifications.

"Vereshchagin was wounded in Bulgaria, too," said Vadim. "We went further north, through Rumania. I was at the Bulgarian frontier, at Kalafat on the Danube."

Next to this canvas was another painting by Vereshchagin—*A Surprise Attack*, from the times of the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Here were the same bearded Russian soldiers, now in white shirts and wide trousers, with lean, sun-tanned visages, beating off a surprise attack by the Bukharites. They had evidently only just rushed out of their tents, and were huddled together in a small group, bristling with bayonets, while the Bukhara cavalry bore down upon them. In the faces of the Russians was a desperate determination to fight to the last... they would not flinch, they would fight with the butt ends of their muskets and with their bayonets, to the last drop of blood, till the last man of them had fallen on to the burning sand, trampled by horses, slashed by the curved Asiatic blades.

Vadim and Rashid stood long before this terrible picture. And each of them thought inwardly: that tall soldier with golden curls and no cap, standing rooted to the spot with drawn sword in front of his comrades,

might have been Vadim's grandfather, and that oriental warrior with the black beard and green turban, rushing upon him with a face distorted by rage, and brandishing his blade for the fatal stroke—Rashid's grandfather. Another minute and they would meet, and either the hoarse Russian oaths or the shrill cry of the Mohammedian would be silenced....

It had all happened only seventy years ago—just the span of a man's life.

"It's an ancient picture," said Rashid respectfully. "Strictly historical." He made a clicking sound with his tongue.

They stood a short time in silence, then Rashid took Vadim's arm and they proceeded to the next hall. Here they fell instantly under the spell of the Russian landscape, with its peculiar fragrant charm, captured in the dewy glades and sunny vistas of Shishkin's oils

Vadim told himself it would be wrong to go too often to the Tretyakov Gallery. For then you would miss the marvellous sensation of renewal felt in the spring when for the first time after the long winter you go to the country, and see the green trees and grass. You have seen the transparent spring sky, inhaled the smell of the earth, of the young grass, felt the fresh coolness of the river, again and again, but each time they move you in a new way. And these still, bright halls, they too moved you in a new way each time you visited them.

The whole of Russia seemed to be there, the great history of the Motherland: here were Vasnetsov's *Three Bogatyrs*, there, the misty morning of the Streltsi execution, the snow-capped Shipka, the melancholy nags in front of the last tavern, the dreary Vladimir road... the proud face of the dying man, white in the darkness of the prison cell... the October sky, crimson with flags, the sailor with the rigid countenance, the victorious swords of the First Mounted Army.... Lenin in his unpretentious study,

creating a great State, and Stalin leading his State up the sunny heights of communism. . . .

The evening sky, now a deep blue, showed through the glass roof. The lights were being switched on in the halls. Towards evening the attendance was still greater, and large groups were to be met with, now in one hall, now in another. People were walking about with open notebooks, busily taking notes. Vadim and Rashid rejoined the others in the lower hall, where there was an exhibition of Soviet graphic art.

When they were all out in the street again, Lena said:

"Vadim, we've been having an argument. Andrei says. . ."

"Hold on a minute!" interrupted Andrei. "First let him give his opinion. It's this: Repin painted *The Volga Boatmen*. Was he happy when it was done?"

"Why, of course he was!"

"All right! What about this: Semiradsky painted *The Sword Dance*. It's beautifully done, ever so vivid and interesting."

"I know the picture, what about it?"

"Well—was Semiradsky happy when he completed his work?"

"I suppose so."

"And now tell us," Lena said excitedly, "what is happiness for an artist? And what is happiness, anyhow?"

Nina and Alexei laughed.

"A most absorbing topic," said Vadim, with a vague smile.

Lena took his arm and said in loud, energetic tones which could be heard all over the street:

"I maintain—are you listening, Vadim?—that Repin and Semiradsky were equally happy, because they both

felt the joy of an artist who has satisfied his creative impulse. Don't you agree with me? But Andrei says Repin's joy must have been more complete, more profound, for he knew the joy not only of an artist, but of a citizen, of a public figure, as well. But in my opinion, happiness isn't a thing you can divide and weigh, like cheese. Grief can be greater or less, but joy—that's something absolute...."

"Tolstoy said: 'Happy families are all alike: every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,'" interpolated Max Vilkin hastily. He was great on quotations.

"Well, Vadim—what do you say? Am I right?" asked Lena, tugging insistently at Vadim's coat sleeve.

"You? No, I don't think so," said Vadim, trying to collect his thoughts and answer as thoroughly and seriously as he could. "Semiradsky, you see, was neither a citizen, nor a social reformer in art. He revived academism in painting, while actually opposing the realistic art of the *Peredvizhniki** school.

"Don't read me a lecture, Vadim."

"I'm not. I'm just telling you about Semiradsky. I don't like him. He's a mere imitator; he's superficial, and his pictures remind one more of the theatre than of life."

"For goodness' sake, does anyone deny it? Just answer me: was he happy when he finished his *Sword Dance*? As an artist I mean. Well, was he?"

"What do you mean by 'happy'?" said Vadim in vexed tones. "It's no good harping on the word 'happy.' First make it clear what you mean by happiness."

"But Vadim, that's just what I'm trying to do."

* The *Peredvizhniki*—a society for holding travelling art exhibitions. The members of this society were Russian artists whose advanced ideas led them to struggle for "realism with a message" and for a democratic form of art. In the 'seventies and 'eighties of the last century they made an inestimable contribution to the development of Russian painting.—*Tr.*

"And that's just what you shouldn't try to do. It seems to me that that's just what can never be settled by discussion. It's a thing to be thought about, not argued about."

"An artist is happy," said Andrei, with his enviable ability to express, simply and earnestly, the most self-evident truths, "when he brings the people nearer to happiness through his work—even if it's only a step, or half a step, nearer."

"Really? And here was I thinking the people didn't count!" said Lena mockingly. "Keep your platitudes for exams, Andrei! And how is it that people who know all about everything never seem to attain happiness themselves? Have you ever been happy, Andrei?"

Here Max displayed great satisfaction.

"Lenochka! That's Goethe! He said: 'All theory is arid, my friend, but the tree of life is eternally green.' That's Goethe!"

"Come on now, Andrei. Tell us if you've ever been happy!" continued Lena, narrowing her eyes roguishly.

Andrei showed sudden embarrassment, and muttered, blushing:

"In what way?"

"You see!" said Lena, laughing triumphantly. "Now you ask in what way! That's just it! One thing I'm certain of, and nobody will persuade me I'm wrong: we only live once, and personal happiness for the individual is very important, almost everything!"

"True," agreed Vadim.

Nina Fokina and Max, who were walking behind, cried out indignantly, both together.

"What do you mean—'true,' Vadim?"

"Hold on!" he said. "It's all a question of what you mean by personal happiness."

"And what do *you* mean?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. Let everyone speak in turn. Which of us..." Vadim turned and, catching sight of

Rashid striding silently beside Ivan Antonovich, clapped him on the shoulder. "Here's the youngest of us all! Come on, now—your idea of happiness, child of the south?"

"Mine?" repeated Rashid, and pulling his fur cap well over his eyes he began bravely: "This is what I say! When the war was on I thought happiness would be the end of the war, victory, my father and brothers—all alive, and all coming home. And then, that happiness did come. And I began to think that happiness was something else—that it would come when I'd finished all ten classes, with a certificate in my hand, and everything in order. And that happiness came, too. And I decided real happiness would come when I got to Moscow and started studying at a Moscow institute. And now..." His teeth gleaming in the darkness, suddenly he tore off his cap and waved it sideways. "See? Is this happiness? Of course it is! I think a person ought to have lots of happiness—all different. All one's life. And the more the better—that's what I think."

"Dostoyevsky said," remarked Max, "that to be happy one needs as much unhappiness as happiness."

"Oh, that!" Lena gave a wave of the hand. "That's as dead as a doornail! Nobody knows what happiness is. I'm sick of arguing, anyhow."

She walked rapidly on and took Alexei's arm.

"Alexei, what's the latest in the world of sport?" she asked loudly. "Did you go to the hockey match? Have you seen the Czechs?"

Vadim, walking behind them, looked at Lena's long winter coat with the fur trimming at the bottom, which undulated with every step she took, and told himself that the world of sport interested her not a jot more than the talk about artists. And he burst out irritably:

"You're chock-full of other people's sayings, Max—what the hell?..."

The conversation subsided of itself. It was windy and cold on the bridge, and everyone bent forward, heads lowered, faces sheltered from the wind behind raised coat collars.

"Why are you all so quiet, youngsters?" asked Krechetov, breaking the silence. "I was listening to you with such interest..."

"The talk was too long for out-of-doors," said Nina. "What's your opinion, Ivan Antonovich? How do you regard happiness?"

"I'm an optimist," said Krechetov, smiling. Turning back the collar of his coat, he addressed Vadim.

"Did you know that the Russian word for 'happiness' originally meant 'sharing'? Picture to yourself the members of some ancient tribe returning from a successful hunt. They start dividing the bag. Everyone gets his 'share,' his 'happiness,' see? It shows that even in the remote past the word 'happiness' had a social meaning. If the tribe had a successful hunt, every member would receive his share, if not, he'd get nothing. Therefore, in order to get his 'share,' his 'happiness,' each one had to participate in the hunt, in other words, to take part in social life. Hence the philosophy of personal happiness."

"How wonderful, Ivan Antonovich!" cried Nina, clapping her hands. "Did you hear that, Lena?"

"Right! Personal feelings merge with social ones," said Rashid with conviction.

"Yes, Rashid, that's when people experience true personal happiness. And no one, by the way, denies there is such a thing."

Ivan Antonovich stopped at the corner and began saying good-bye. But the students insisted on seeing him to his bus stop, where they stood talking animatedly, much to the entertainment of the people queued up, til' the bus came.

On the way home Alyosha Remeshkov also expressed himself with regard to the problem:

"I call it happiness that lectures begin an hour later tomorrow morning," he said. "And unhappiness that our room monitor is that devil, Lagodenko. The brute will rout us out of bed at seven just the same, tearing off the blankets and making us do physical jerks when we might have another hour's sleep."

Alexei sighed and shook his head dejectedly.

As they were passing along Frunze Street, the students took it into their heads to go and see Sergei Palavin. Vadim and Lena climbed to the fourth storey, the others electing to go to the nearest shop to get some buns—all were sharp-set—and wait for Vadim and Lena downstairs.

The door flew open the moment Vadim pressed the push button. In the hall stood Irina Victorovna and Valya, Sergei's friend from the Medical Institute, whom Vadim had met several times. She had her coat on and was putting on her cap. Irina Victorovna greeted Vadim delightedly, and shook hands politely with Lena, at whom she shot a keen glance that was almost too frankly inquisitive.

"We've only come for a minute. They're waiting for us downstairs," said Vadim in involuntarily apologetic tones.

"Come in! Come in! Take your coat off, Vadim! I'm so glad you've come!" exclaimed Irina Victorovna eagerly. "Won't you take your things off, Lena—you're Lena, aren't you? This way, Lenchka...."

Valya passed Vadim on her way to the front door with a silent nod, her lips compressed. "Doesn't she know me?" wondered Vadim, chilled for a moment by the antipathy which seemed to emanate from her. "She's shortsighted, of course, and she won't wear glasses." Of late he had not often met Valya at Sergei's and Sergei scarcely ever mentioned her now.

Lena went into the room, but Irina Victorovna kept Vadim for a moment in the passage.

"Wait a minute, Vadim!" she whispered, raising her brows significantly. "They've just had a quarrel, so don't ask any questions...."

"Who?"

"Why, Sergei and Valya! I got home late and Valya came in to—er—help him, heat something up for him, well, anyhow... and he's awfully irritable when he's ill. And somehow he offended her."

"Offended her?"

"Yes. It's nothing, of course. You've got to know how to treat him, it takes patience...." Irina Victorovna took Vadim's tie in her two hands and pulled it taut, straightened his shirt collar carefully, and to his surprise asked him, in the same whisper: "D'you like Valya?"

"Valya?" said Vadim in astonishment. "She's a nice girl. Steady, reliable...."

Irina Victorovna sighed.

"She's a very good girl. It's such a pity she's not quite suitable for Sergei."

"Why not, Irina Victorovna?"

"She has something wrong with her lungs, Vadim."

Irina Victorovna said this in a very low voice, wrinkling her forehead sadly. "You understand? And Sergei's grandfather died of tuberculosis. It's an awful pity! Go on in, now, Vadim."

Giving him a gentle push towards the door, she asked:

"Lena's a fellow student of yours, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"She seems to be a nice little thing."

Sergei was half reclining on the bed, smoking and narrowing his eyes languidly as he looked at Lena, who was talking eagerly about the Tretyakov Gallery. He had a warm muffler round his neck, but did not look

particularly unwell, except that he was rather pale and had not had a shave.

"How's your paper, Vadim? Getting on with it?" he asked as soon as Vadim entered.

"It's going very slowly. Looks as if I'll get it finished in the second term."

"Oh, Vadim!" Sergei was so alarmed that he almost rose. "You won't get into the journal!"

"All right, I won't. I'll get into the next, what does it matter?"

But Sergei began eagerly to assure Vadim that it was the first issue which was important, and that he must do his utmost to get into it.

"It'll be a disgrace! All sorts of nobodies will be published, and you won't be included. A disgrace! I'm ill, but I'm working just the same, I keep going all the time. I've changed my subject, you know. I'm writing about Turgenyev's plays. Boris Matveyevich advised me to. Oh, I know!"

Sergei smote the blanket joyfully with the palm of his hand. "Listen! Why shouldn't I give you my paper on Heine, with all the material, and the plans? I will! It's half done—well, a third done at any rate...."

"What do I want with it?"

"You could finish it in a fortnight and be in time for the first issue. And then you can go on quietly with your own theme for the second term. That's an idea, isn't it? Brilliant! Isn't it, Lena?"

"It is, it is! Go ahead, Vadim!"

"Why should I?" said Vadim, shaking his head. "Why should I finish someone else's work? I'm doing my own."

"It isn't just someone else's. It's mine, not just anybody's! You said yourself we must help each other—don't you remember? Andrei helped Nina Fokina, didn't he?"

"That was quite different. Oh, no, it won't do at all!"
"Just as you like, of course!"

Sergei shrugged his shoulders and turned towards Lena.

"You see what he is!" he said mournfully. "It's that false pride of his, he's a snob in reverse, and he'll always be in the shade. I suggested it for your own good, you silly ass!"

"Rubbish! Calm down, old fellow, it's bad for you to excite yourself."

"Never mind me! It's you..." scolded Sergei, settling back on the pillows. "It's a shame! Andrei and that blue-stocking Fokina will be published, and Vadim Belov..."

"Belov will be all right," said Vadim, smiling. "He'll leave you all behind when the time comes—see if he doesn't!"

Lena glanced at her watch and rose quickly from her chair.

"Oh, Vadim, we've been sitting here a quarter of an hour! Come on! The others will be tired of waiting."

"They'll wait, don't you worry."

"No, Vadim, it isn't nice. Come on this minute!"

Vadim got up reluctantly. He had been hoping all the time that the others would get tired of waiting and go away. But they wouldn't, he was sure. That wouldn't be the comradely thing to do.

"We met your doctor," said Lena, from the door. "That was the doctor, wasn't it—that washed-out plain girl?"

Sergei looked sideways at Vadim and nodded.

"Yes, she's a doctor."

"She's very young."

"Yes. And if you only knew how sick I am of her..." Sergei made a weak gesture with his hand and laughed mirthlessly. "Worse than a dose of medicine! Thanks for dropping in. Vadim, mind you don't forget those books you promised me—Mehring and Lunacharsky."

He extended his legs, covered himself with the blanket up to his chin, and looked instantly like a sick person. Irina Victorovna came into the room on tiptoe, carrying a saucepan full of steaming milk in which floated yellow specks of melted butter.

Vadim's hopes had been in vain—they were all patiently waiting in the doorway, and had saved two buns for them. Going home, Lena seized the arms of Nina Fokina and Alexei and went in front with them. This did not upset Vadim; on the contrary he thought it a good thing. Of late he had felt freer, more at his ease amongst the others when not too near Lena.

He thought over Sergei's proposal and Sergei's indignation at his refusal, and told himself that, after all, the help had been proffered in the friendliest spirit. That was good. Every demonstration of friendship, however trivial or absurd, warmed one's heart, and made one the happier.

And he felt a sudden surge of joy at the thought that he was walking with friends, and that there were so many of them, and all so different, so gay, so real, and that among them was Lena, her voice ringing out above the other voices, as they trolled in chorus the songs of youth, and that every man they met noticed her, while the women smiled.

The frost abated towards nightfall. The sky had cleared, and was as deep and starry as in the pictures of Kuindji. But nothing else reminded Vadim of pictures—neither the people they met and passed, nor the busy street corners, decked out in coloured lights, nor the boulevards they traversed, seething with the lively and elaborate games of children. These were all inimitable, all as new and fresh as if he had never seen them before.

Vadim's ear for music was not his strong point, but he sang just the same, and even enjoyed it.

At the hostel news awaited them. Lagodenko had sat for his Russian Literature examination again, and had

failed—for the third time. Kozelsky had held his examinations at home, and Lagodenko had wrangled with the professor in his own study, accusing him of pedantry, dogmatism, and being a “petty, vindictive individual, who knew nothing about literature.” All this was told them by Raya Volkova, Lagodenko’s close friend.

“Whatever will happen to Pyotr?” she asked distractedly. “Isn’t he an idiot? Oh, what an idiot he is!”

Lagodenko himself was not in the hostel. Raya said he had come back from the professor’s house bad-tempered and gloomy, telling her all about it through clenched teeth, and had then gone out to “roam the town.”

Chapter 7

Of late Sergei seemed always to be catching cold. His day would begin with a cold in the head, and end with a headache. Partly, of course, it was the weather, which rang the changes on slush, frost, and a hesitant, fine snow. There was no real winter weather.

“You’re run down,” Valya told him. “Poor metabolism. You should go in for sport.”

He was sure she only said this to spite him—she was one of those people who like saying unpleasant things under the guise of friendly sincerity. If he did not go in for sport, who did, he’d like to know! Wasn’t he the star player on the Institute volleyball team?

His mother was convinced that it all came of Sergei’s not wearing woollen socks, and smoking too much. He was sick of her fussy solicitude, and the everlasting advice and scolding, which differed in no way, it seemed to him, from the advice and scolding she had given him ten years before. Sometimes he told her irritably: “I’ve been in the army, I’ve slept God knows where, in the open, in swamps, and never caught anything. But the moment I get back you start your fuss and preaching and

lamentations, and for some reason or other I start catching cold. What's the reason—tell me that! What's the reason?"

What irritated him most of all was that his mother, three years after his return from the army, seemed to have quite forgotten that he had been at the front, had seen much that was harsh and terrible, and become a man, knowing things she could never have dreamed of.

At first she had treated him with respect, listening to his tales from the front with naive wonder, and feeling proud of him. He had liked that. But soon there had been nothing more to remember, and even when some forgotten occurrence came back to him, he had felt no desire to relate it to her. Now it seemed to him that his mother, and even his little brother, only listened to him to give him pleasure.

Sergei was alone in the house—Irina Victorovna had not yet come back from work. Sasha had gone with his friends to a skating rink.

His temperature had been normal for two days, but he had not yet returned to the Institute. He still had a wretched cold in the head, which kept him in low spirits. He had no desire to do anything whatsoever, and all his efforts ended in failure. And there was so much to do—first and foremost he ought to be writing.

He was his own doctor: he took some pills, muffled up his throat, hung a rug over the balcony door against the draught, and went into the passage as seldom as possible.

The work wouldn't go. He sat for two hours at his desk without writing a line. He couldn't study, either. With regard to study, however, he had his own method, which invariably worked: to sit up two nights before an examination, well supplied with tobacco and black coffee. He almost always got high marks.

Lusya Voronkova unexpectedly looked in during the day. She was behind with her English and Sergei was

coaching her. This was one of his voluntary social obligations.

"How are we today—any better?" asked Lusya, regarding his muffled neck and drowsy face.

"Just a little...."

"Do you take streptocide? Aspirin's no good--take streptocide! Or—d'you know what!" She spoke in her usual stubbornly practical fashion. "Get some dried hips at the chemist's, and make a brew of them—that helps marvellously! And you ought to use menthol ointment in your nose. Chin up! You just take streptocide—you'll be a new man tomorrow! You don't look any too well. Will you be able to work with me?"

"Of course I will. Take off your coat."

In his heart he could not take Lusya Voronkova seriously, chiefly because he did not regard her as a woman. She was so angular and dry, and her voice was so harsh—much too loud and assured for a girl. She wore her hair short, and even so it was always untidy. Lusya was in the Trade Union Committee, an active club organizer, and always well up in events at the Institute.

"There's to be a prelim on Monday," said she. "If I'm plucked I shan't be able to take the examination. And I'm certain to be plucked. Olga Markovna's on the ramp, they say she's divorcing her husband. I'd like you to go over a few things from our old lessons with me."

After retailing a few more details of the English teacher's domestic life in the same brisk manner, Lusya seated herself in an armchair and set out her exercise books in a row. They began to work. Sergei walked up and down the room dictating exercises from the English grammar in a rheumy head voice.

"Every evening I have tea and biscuits.... Do you have tea and biscuits every evening?" After all, it wasn't a bad thing that she had come. He wouldn't have written a line anyhow, and he wouldn't have studied. "No, I do

not. Yes, I do. Tea and biscuits are very good for me." It was no trouble, it didn't take long, and after all it was a sort of comradely aid.... "Do you like having tea and biscuits?"

Lusya wrote badly and read still worse. She mumbled as if she had toothache, apparently considering that the more indistinctly she spoke, the more English it would sound.

They worked for an hour, after which Lusya declared she could no longer concentrate.

"If I work at a language more than an hour," she said, "my head begins to ache. I wonder why I'm so bad at languages, Sergei! I'm not such a dolt, am I?"

"Of course you're not," he said indulgently. "Huarte, the Spanish philosopher, says memory and reason spring from opposite centres. Memory develops at the expense of reason, and reason at the expense of memory. So you can console yourself by thinking that your reasoning powers are too great."

"Really? Was there such a philosopher?" Lusya was delighted. "What a clever man! What did you say he was called?"

They had tea. At first Lusya refused, but Sergei insisted—he was thirsty himself. Over tea, Lusya told Sergei in the strictest confidence that there was an idea of recommending him for the Belinsky Scholarship. Him and Andrei Sirikh. The Council of Studies would decide which of them it was to be. But Lusya was sure it would be Sergei. She could not tell him who had told her, but she knew it for a fact. And Krechetov was vehemently supporting Andrei Sirikh.

This was news to Sergei.

"Well, Andrei certainly deserves to get it," he said, getting up to hide his emotion, and pacing up and down the room. "He's a nice chap, everyone likes him. They're sure to choose him."

"Why? They might easily give it to you."

Sergei waved his hand.

"Not they! I don't count on it in the least!"

After a pause, during which he strode more and more rapidly about the room, he said thoughtfully:

"Of course, it's not just the money . . . it's the honour. The Belinsky Scholarship—that's something, isn't it? Never mind, though, nothing is known as yet, so it's no good discussing it."

But he was warmed and cheered by the thought that very soon—not later than next month probably—he would be in receipt of a scholarship. He was sure they would give it to him, not Andrei. First there would be the announcement hung up for everyone to read, and everybody would congratulate him, and then, on the twentieth, he would go to the bookkeeper. "You are a scholarship student, I think?" "No thinking about it—I *am*!" The girl at the pay desk would get out a separate short list, with everyone in the queue looking on—those who got their money according to the general list, as big and as uninteresting as a telephone directory. It wasn't the money, of course, but still . . . there'd be no harm in an extra 150 or 200 rubles a month, would there?

He went to the kitchen again to heat up the kettle. He wasn't thirsty now, but he wanted to keep Lusya—perhaps she would tell him something else, remember some more details.

But Lusya had nothing more to say about the scholarship, except once more to urge that it was "strictly between ourselves, mind you; don't tell anyone, or you'll get me and another person into trouble. But it's a fact."

Sergei lay down on the sofa and Lusya sat in the armchair smoking, her knees crossed. She had thin legs and her knees were sharp. Her chin, too, was sharp. So was her nose. She talked incessantly, and all the time about trifles. Sergei was already beginning to be tired

of her. But no, she was giving him yet another important bit of information! There was to be a Komsomol meeting on Wednesday, to discuss Lagodenko's behaviour. It hadn't been announced yet, but it would be on Monday. Sergei had heard about Lagodenko's behaviour from Vadim. Lagodenko had been rude to Kozelsky while taking his examination, but Sergei did not know exactly what he had said to the professor. He had certain old grudges against Lagodenko, and there was no love lost between them.

"Quite right—he must be given a lesson!" he said. "I've always disliked that bumptious sailor boy."

"Oh, yes, he must! He must be given a lesson by the whole student body, and made to feel it!" exclaimed Lusya with surprising ardour. "He considers himself everybody's superior—and who is he, after all! But you'll see, he'll find people to stick up for him at the meeting!"

"Who?"

"There'll be plenty! His pal, Andrei Sirikh, Raya Volkova, the boys from his hostel. The girls in our hostel have been arguing about him for two days. It'll be a noisy meeting—you'll see! They'll talk about Kozelsky, too, and you know there are some who are against him."

"Will Andrei stick up for Lagodenko?"

"He may not exactly stick up for him, but he'll start talking about Kozelsky, and that'll be sure to set the faculty against him. After all, it's not our business to interfere with teaching, to try and teach the professors...."

"It certainly isn't."

"It would be simply idiotic, it would be tactless! Supposing Kozelsky does make a mistake here and there, there are others to set him right. There's the Chair, the Director, and, last but not least, there's the Party Committee...."

"Yes, yes," said Sergei, frowning. "I shall probably speak at the meeting. If I find it necessary."

"You'll see when the time comes. But you can certainly speak about Lagodenko's behaviour. As an old member of the Komsomol, an active one, you're bound to, you know! People respect you, they listen to your opinions. So you can't just say nothing."

Sergei nodded. "I shall speak."

It had become quite dark. The radio in the adjacent flat had given the three peeps of the 7 o'clock signal. Lusya began hastily gathering up her things. Sergei put on his coat too, to see her to the Metro.

"You needn't do that," protested Lusya. "You stay at home, you've got a cold. I'm old enough to go alone, aren't I?"

However, Sergei insisted, and saw her to the Metro station. He had to buy tobacco, anyhow.

When he got back he sat down at his desk and made another attempt to write. The fresh air had done him good; his head did not ache quite so much. For two days he had temporarily laid aside his paper—books fatigued him—and taken up his novel.

He had begun writing at the front, where he had contributed for a time to the army newspaper. In the Institute he occasionally sent verses and short articles signed "Sergei Lavin" to the wall newspaper. In his second year he had considered writing a play about undergraduate life, but, either because he had taken too long getting his material together, or discussed his play too much with his friends, he never got beyond the stage of planning and talking.

Everyone in the Institute knew that Palavin was a writing man, that he was "working on something," and since no one was aware of the existence of any other potential writers among the students, they felt something like respect for Palavin.

A month before, he had begun writing a novel about young factory workers. The editor of the army paper to

which Sergei had formerly contributed was now in the office of a Moscow journal, and promised his help with regard to publication. Sergei began working with enthusiasm. In the space of ten days he covered forty pages with his minute handwriting, and the end was still a long way ahead. Afterwards, however, it had not gone so smoothly and rapidly. His characters, in the first chapters so energetic and optimistic, had suddenly become mere puppets, their movements languid, their thoughts slow, their words trite....

Today, too, he had sat over his novel till noon, by which time he had produced nothing but a couple of paragraphs which had to be scrapped, and a procession of fantastic monsters scrawled over the paper. It must be that he was exhausted by his illness. He would have to give himself a rest.

Closing the inkpot, he lay down on the sofa and smoked. Just then his mother came in.

"Alone, Sergei? How's your flu?" she asked, putting down her brief case.

He told her his flu was just the same. Irina Victorovna began immediately getting dinner, running in and out of the kitchen, clattering saucepans, letting potatoes fall with resounding thumps from the pail into a basin. "No concentrating now!" said Sergei to himself in vexation. He had still hoped to get down to his novel. Sometimes quite good ideas came into his head while he was lying on the sofa.

Suddenly it dawned upon him that the thing to do was to put aside his novel for the time. He could put off working on it till the next term. And now, without a moment's delay, he would work at his paper and finish it as soon as possible, in time to read it at the S.R.S. before the sitting of the Council of Studies. This was extremely important. The paper was the great thing at present.

Irina Victorovna, coming into the room, asked:

"Are you working? Thinking?"

"Yes, I am," he said.

He had been thinking what a pity it was they hadn't awarded him the Belinsky Scholarship, this month. The extra money would have come in handy for the New Year.

"All right. I'll be as quiet as I can."

Trying not to make a noise, Irina Victorovna took some dishes out of the sideboard and went back to the kitchen. At dinner she said in animated tones:

"I almost forgot to tell you! Valya came to see me today."

"Where?" he asked, putting down his knife and fork in astonishment.

"At the office. She came during the dinner hour. We talked for about half an hour."

"Well?"

"I told her. . ."

"What did she come about?"

"Why are you so cross, Sergei?"

"I'm not cross, I'm just asking you what she came for," he repeated irritably.

"She just came to see me . . . she asked about you, and your work. She's very busy, she's been elected to something or other. And she brought me the blue wool she promised me."

"What wool?"

"Don't you remember me telling her I wanted to knit you a sweater, and was looking for dark-blue wool? White shows the dirt so. And Valya promised to get me some—don't you remember? Well, she brought it. Sergei, do take some bread! What's a meal without bread?"

He looked morosely at his mother without seeing her, deep in his own thoughts. Then he suddenly threw down his fork with a ringing sound.

“I didn’t want any sweater! You shouldn’t have taken wool from her! I don’t want you to, bear that in mind. I won’t have it! Why do you go poking your nose into other people’s affairs?”

“You’re simply awful today, Sergei!” said Irina Victorovna nervously. “I know you’re ill, but...”

“It’s not that I’m ill, it’s this hypocrisy that drives me mad! As if you couldn’t get wool anywhere in Moscow except from Valya!”

“If you want me...”

“I want you to give back the wool—that’s all!”

“All right, I’ll go to her this minute! Without even finishing my dinner!”

“Give it back to her, I tell you! Came to see you ... Lady Bountiful!”

“She’s not a Lady Bountiful, she’s just a nice, obliging girl, and you’ve become an impossible grumbler. It’s disgusting at your age!” said Irina Victorovna angrily. “And if you dislike wool...”

“I don’t dislike wool,” laughed Sergei. “I only dislike having the wool pulled over my eyes. Kindly remember that!”

The pun seemed to calm him, and he took up his fork and went on eating. Irina Victorovna began eating, too, but was so upset that she lost her appetite. She pushed away her plate and got up from the table.

“Never ask me for anything again! Find somebody else to make you a sweater!”

Sergei did not reply, but went on eating his meat balls with gusto, spreading mustard over them thickly. When he had finished, Sasha came in. He was rosy from skating, all shining and crimson, and his black eyes were moist and joyful. He brought with him a breath of freshness from the spacious, frosty streets.

“Here I am!” he cried gaily, throwing down his skates at the door. “Oh, Mamma, didn’t I skate, just! I can

hardly stand! Lyova and I had a race. It's ripping there—there's a band, and lights, and such crowds and crowds of people! And I'm so hungry!"

"Put your skates away this minute!" snapped Irina Victorovna, who was laying a third cover. "I can't stand this disgusting habit of throwing things down just where you are! How many times have I told you . . . one might as well speak to the wall!"

Sasha gazed in astonishment from his mother to his brother.

"What's the matter with you people?"

"Nothing's the matter! Don't talk nonsense! Wash your hands and come and sit down this minute!"

Irina Victorovna went to the kitchen.

"Sergei!" said Sasha, going up to his brother. "What's up?"

"Nothing's up!" said Sergei roughly. "You're only a kid. Go and wash your hands, do your lessons, and keep your mouth shut!"

"How cross you are!" Sasha paused in perplexity, and then said firmly. "Very well, then! I shan't tell you who I saw at the rink!"

"Don't trouble! I'll bear it somehow!"

He went up to the bookcase, took out a volume of Herzen, and lay down on the sofa. Nobody spoke in the room for a time.

Then Sasha said severely:

"Have some tea? And some biscuits?"

"Tea and biscuits!" laughed Sergei. "No, I never do."

He cheered up, remembering what Lusya had said about the scholarship, and stretched his legs luxuriously.

Sasha's good humour returned to him after he had had dinner, and he could no longer keep his news to himself. "Very well, then, I'll tell you who I saw—Vadim and that girl who came to see you. Lena, isn't she?"

Sergei sat up.

"Lena? Were they together?"

"Of course, they were skating together. And Lena had on a pull-over with reindeers, like in the cinema..."

Sergei grunted and returned to his book. But after turning a few pages he asked:

"Did they ask after me? Didn't Vadim?"

"No, he only waved his hand to me."

After running his eye over a few more lines, Sergei threw down the book, turned his face to the wall, and lay there for some time staring at the wallpaper. Then he got up and went to his room to have a sleep.

Vadim was at that moment crossing the Krymsky Bridge. He had just seen Lena to the Metro and was going home on foot.

It was windy on the bridge, as usual. The huge steel pillars were lit up at the base, their summits invisible, losing themselves in the sombre sky, which was not black, but slate-coloured, a misty grey from the lights of the city beneath.

Nocturnal Moscow, spreading itself out before Vadim, was a city of lights. It had been full of people all day but now they seemed to have made way for the myriads of lights. They clustered on the horizon, shimmering like phosphorescent waves, and beyond them were more lights, merged into one powerful glow.

On the other side of the bridge lay the Park of Culture and Rest, still, snow-clad, solitary. The vast rink along the embankment, only an hour ago the scene of riotous life, was now deserted. The deafening loud-speakers, which had been singing incessantly all the evening, were silent. From where he was it was impossible to make out the narrow dark lane where he and Lena had gone to rest on a bench.

It all came back to him—the bench at the turn of the path, beside the broad lane; the ice around it, scratched and splintered by skates, and in the middle of the lane, a striped plywood buoy, like those indicating sandbanks in rivers, with the words “Danger! Rough Ice!” written on it. Vadim had been hot and had unwound his muffler and pushed his cap off his damp brow.

“I’m going round and round ... my head’s going round, I’m drunk!” Thus, Lena, laughing and throwing herself against the back of the bench. “Vadim! Put your hand behind my head, the bench is awfully hard!”

He had sat closer to her, slipping his arm along the back of the bench, and she had rested her head on his arm. There was a dark flush on her cheeks, and a moist gleam on her lips. People were passing up and down the wide lane all the time. Little boys skated up to them, turning sharply right in front of their bench, to show off their skill. The militiaman on duty went by on his skates with slow dignity. Like all militiamen on the ice, he held himself exaggeratedly erect, assuming a proprietary air, his arms held stiffly away from his sides, his glance travelling slowly from right to left. He propelled himself forward with the same foot all the time.

A tall, spectacled gentleman, in a regular skating outfit, but obviously on skates for the first time in his life, followed slowly in the wake of the militiaman, every now and then bending suddenly forward from the waist, as if bowing rapidly. Suddenly coming to a halt, he began slipping about alarmingly, stamping and waving his arms frantically, and at last toppled over without a word and fell on his back.

Lena laughed and leaned forward just when Vadim had made up his mind to kiss her.

“Remember our argument about happiness?” she asked suddenly. “You didn’t say anything, you know...”

He did not want to talk about happiness just now, he did not want to talk at all. He wanted to kiss her. Words would not have been any good, indeed they would have been an interference. Lena moved closer to him, saying thoughtfully, her head on one side: "Happiness—d'you know what it is?"

After a slight pause she recited in an expressive voice:

*There are moments when life's tribulations
Pass unnoticed, like birds in the night;
Someone's hand lightly touches your shoulder,
Someone's smile fills your soul with delight.*

Her eyes half-closed, she went on reciting the poem in an almost inaudible voice:

*In an instant the cares that beset you,
Slink away, to be lost in the dark,
While across a diaphanous heaven,
Hope flings a radiant arc.*

"Yes, that's happiness," said Vadim, putting his arms round her, and kissing her eyelids, her cheeks, her burning lips. Some more little boys skated up to them, performing their figures right in front of the bench.

"We can't rest here," said Lena, rising and humming the refrain of the loud-speaker's song. "Let's go over to that arbour—it's quiet there. And it looks so mysterious."

Vadim rose briskly.

"All right," he said. "But there's nothing to sit on there."

"We can take this bench over. Come on!"

"Just a minute!"

He pushed Lena out of the way and gave the bench a little shake.

"I can carry it alone."

Picking it up in his two hands, he raised it in a single movement over his head. A shower of crisp snow descended upon him. Striking out diagonally, he skated slowly over to the arbour. Lena fluttered around him, saying in frightened tones: "Oh, Vadim, you'll fall! Do be careful! Shall I help you?"

"I'll manage."

"Put it down! Put it down this minute!" cried Lena. "I know you're strong! A regular Novak, or Poddubny.* Hercules himself!"

His wrists trembled and bent, his ankles wobbled now and again. At last he reached the arbour and flung the bench clattering on to the frost-covered wooden floor. Lena ran after him, her skates knocking loudly against the boards. It was almost pitch dark in the arbour, but Vadim suddenly caught sight of the burning glow of a cigarette thrown down on the floor, and above it, against a pillar, two figures standing close to one another.

"Back, Vadim!" whispered Lena, and flew down the steps on to the ice.

Vadim, slightly flustered, followed her. Lena was already speeding along the lane, laughing unrestrainedly. And from the arbour a pleased bass voice called after him:

"Thanks a lot, old man!"

And again the great rink, music, the suffused radiance of lights on ice. And Lena's hand in a wet mitten, so frail and light, but becoming so unexpectedly firm when they made turns.

They did not say another word to each other that evening. It seemed to him that there would be plenty of such evenings to come. And there would be the same lights

* Grigori Novak—Soviet weight-lifter, many times world champion.

Ivan Poddubny—Soviet wrestler who also held the title of world champion for some years.—*Tr.*

melting into the sky, and the song of the ice, and the music, and beside him the laughing girl with the slender, docile palm. All this would be his many, many times. He believed this with joyous faith.

...Just as Vadim was passing the white gates of the park, almost hidden by brilliantly illuminated posters, two girls suddenly ran up to him.

"Vadim! Belov!" they cried from the distance. "Wait for us!"

Plump, black-eyed Marina Gravets was in his class, the other, Simochka Mukhtarova, a pretty gipsy-looking girl, studied in the History Department. They were both in skiing trousers, and carried skates.

"You'd never think he was working for the English tests," said Marina in her gay drawl.

"What? Are we to have a test?"

"On Monday. Olga Markovna began threatening us the day before yesterday. It's going to be fierce! All the tenses!"

"He can't understand that," said Simochka in a low voice. "Only the present exists for him."

"Oh, I see!" said Marina, nodding gravely.

Vadim tried to look innocent.

He went with the girls as far as Kaluzhskaya Street. All the way he joked with them and told them stories and he himself laughed over nothing at all. He felt gay as never before.

"We know why you're so up-in-the-air today," said Marina suddenly, smiling enigmatically. "We do, don't we, Simochka?"

"We do! We do!" replied Simochka in a deep voice. Vadim laughed.

"You're a couple of sibyls, you two!"

They arrived at the square, where they had to wait at the corner for the stream of cars to pass.

"Looking at you two," continued Marina, playfully, "I had a feeling that you were discussing the latest lessons in political economy."

"Now really!" said Vadim. "And all the time we were declaring our love for one another, and reciting poetry."

Marina laughed heartily.

"Look out, Belov!" she cried. "Courting on the ice is a very slippery business. But, on the whole," she added seriously, "you're getting on."

Chapter 8

Andrei Sirikh lived all the year round in Borskoye, a suburb of Moscow. It was noisy and crowded in the summer, full of holidaymakers, mostly young people. There were boathouses and bathing sheds, and the volleyball on the court bumped with a hollow sound from morning to night. Life was as vivid and gay as a scene from a film. But it was soon over, this inimitable summer life, and it took with it the fragrance of the meadows, the quiet music of evening, the creaking of oarlocks and the soft moist touch of sand underfoot. Like the falling stars of August it flashed across the sky and disappeared.

And then came autumn; the summer cottages were abandoned, hardly anyone was now encountered in field or woods but a few cultivators of vegetable plots, hastening to the bus stop with sacks of potatoes over their shoulders. Gossamer waved undisturbed in the air, the paths through the woods were buried in rotting leaves, which would lie there till the snow came and buried these too, and far off on the river resounded the lonely hooting of the last steamer with a stray passenger shivering in the cabin.

And for long months Borskoye would be wrapt in silence and snow. Months of blue frosty mornings, blue twilights, the barking of dogs across the river at night,

the rustle of snow, and, far away on the horizon, the seductive winking lights on the outskirts of Moscow.

And not a trace of all this was to be found in the prosaic bustle of the rain-drenched, busy town. Andrei spent very little time in Borskoye. He went to the Institute in the early morning, had his dinner at the dining room after lectures, then went to work in the library. He returned to Borskoye late, sometimes not going back at all, but spending the night with friends in the hostel.

Andrei's father was foreman at a large machinery works. During the war Andrei had worked at a big plant too, though not at his father's. He had been rejected by the military school on account of his eyesight, and in 1942, a lad of seventeen, he had gone to work. During the first two months he had worked in the tube-casting shop. Then he was transferred to a blast furnace, and after that he worked as a mechanic. After two years at the bench, he was made dispatcher in the tool shop. He had many friends at the plant, and when he left it to study he was sure these friendships would continue, that he would never lose touch with the lads in whose company he had spent the hard years of war.

And at first he really did go to the plant every week, visiting the Komsomol Committee, the club and the hostel. Then these visits grew rarer, and in a year's time they ceased altogether. The new life took a firm hold on him, new interests claimed him, and above all else there was the eternal shortage of time, of which there never seemed to be enough in Moscow.

Every now and then, in the streets, the tram, or on an escalator in the Metro, going in the opposite direction—Andrei would see someone from the works. But time was always short, and it would have been no use trying to talk in such a crush, with people scurrying by, so they would merely exchange a handshake, and smiling greetings:

"You look fine! How's everything?"

"All right! How are things at the works?"

"We jog along. Nesterov's gone away to study, so we have a new director."

"Have you? So Nesterov's gone!"

"Been gone for some time. You should drop in one day, Andrei!"

"I will! I'll be round one of these days."

And again he was quite certain that he would go. He was perfectly sincere in his intentions. There was mingled sadness and pleasure in these encounters.

Quite recently Andrei had met Pavel Kuznetsov at an ice-hockey match. He caught sight of him as the crowd was pouring out of the stadium, recognizing him by his broad shoulders and familiar leather cap. After the first joyful exclamations and back-slapping, the friends wandered off together for a talk. It seemed that Pavel had left the shop, and was now Secretary of the Komsomol Committee at the plant.

"Soon I'll be calling a meeting to report on what we've accomplished in my term of service," he said proudly.

"It's been a long time since I've seen you—two whole years," sighed Andrei. "Sometimes I envy Turgenev's characters—all they ever did was go visiting and drink tea. That's the life!"

Both of them laughed, and Kuznetsov took Andrei's arm.

"I have something I want to speak to you about, Andrei."

"What is it?"

"Remember all the circles at our club—music, drama, chess, art? We had all these while you were still there. Then we started one in dressmaking for the girls, and an automobile circle, and now we want to have one in literature. Our workers are interested in literature—the

library is always crowded. We even have our own authors."

"At the plant?"

"Well, not exactly authors, but people who write. Remember Valentin Batukin, Kuzmin's learner? You remember Kuzmin, don't you—foreman of Shop No. 6? The fellow with a beard. Well, it's his learner I'm talking about, a freckle-faced chap named Valentin. A planer—already fifth category. You ought to see the poems he turns out! They go into our paper. Everybody says he's a born poet. He has one in today's issue—a satire on our dining room. He aimed a neat one at the queues. And there are others who write, too. We've got the people all right."

"That's interesting," said Andrei.

"Isn't it? So we want to start a literary circle. The fellows are talented enough, but they lack education. The District Committee of the Komsomol advised us to apply to the Literature Department of some institute for a circle leader. I was wondering if you couldn't recommend somebody. Some good third- or fourth-year student. It could be a girl. Once a week or once a fortnight, in the evenings. I'll arrange things with the Trade Union Committee. Perhaps you could handle it yourself? Or are you too busy?"

"Let me think it over," said Andrei. "I'll ring you up tomorrow."

Andrei always talked things over with his father. The habit had started in his childhood, long, long ago, after the death of his mother. His father was foreman of a group of fitters, and was often sent on business trips to factories in Leningrad, Rostov, and Kolomna. The responsibilities Andrei was forced to shoulder so early in life made him mature quickly, and soon he became his father's aid and companion. Stepan Afanasyevich was a

jovial, interesting man. Whenever he sat down to the dinner table on returning from work, he would say:

"Well, young folks, what have you done for the era today?"—and Andrei and his sister, Olga, were expected to give a detailed account of the school day. In his turn, Stepan Afanasyevich would tell them the latest news from the factory, or relate some amusing incident, delighting in giving imitations of their Chief Engineer, or a boy from the Trade School, or the grumbling o'd man who calculated quota fulfilment.

As soon as he heard of Kuznetsov's proposal, Stepan Afanasyevich burst out:

"Take it, of course! I've been telling you all along not to lose contact with the factory. The working class! You must never lose touch with the workers!"

"So you advise me to take charge of the circle myself?"

"I don't only advise you, I insist on it—for your own good," said Stepan Afanasyevich, looking very severe and lifting a warning finger. Sudden'y he grinned, his strong teeth flashing through his beard, and added musingly: "When you finish that academy of yours and have all that book learning inside of you, what are you going to be—a teacher, or one of those literary critics?"

Andrei smiled.

"I've told you time and again I'm going to teach. You need have no doubt about that."

"All right, all right! Then they'll ship you off somewhere to the ends of the earth with nothing but steppe or taiga all round and hunters and fishermen and such like, and not a literary critic in sight. And you'll start teaching their kids book learning, and the kids'll teach you all sorts of queer things, like that exiled student once taught me history, while I taught him how to catch blackbirds."

"Your tea's getting cold, Dad," said Olga pushing her father's glass towards him.

"Don't rush me. And when I get old I'll come out and live with you. You with your school children, me with my grandchildren. We'll keep bees. Ah!" He sighed and shook his head, smiling. "Don't your dad like to run on though? He knows all the time he'll never leave that factory of his, but he goes raving on. No point in it! But how are we going to manage when you finish your studies?"

"No need to worry about that until the time comes," said Andrei, frowning.

He disliked such talk. Of late his father's thoughts were constantly turning to the inevitable separation from his children. On the one hand he considered that they ought to go where they were most needed—places lacking highly qualified specialists; but on the other hand he realized he could never go with them. Work at the factory was as dear to him as life itself.

That was the thought that came into his mind now, as he suddenly grew silent and toyed with his teaspoon.

"Have you forgotten you promised to mend the mincer for me?" asked Olga. "The screw comes out."

"Comes out, does it?" said her father, vigorously stirring his tea. "Well, we'll see that it stays in."

That night, as Andrei lay on the short, bumpy couch near the window, he had difficulty in falling asleep. He kept thinking about the circle he was to lead, about the new people he was to meet, the old friendships he would renew. Would he be able to rouse the workers' interest? Could he speak to them in a way that would be simple, yet absorbing? Perhaps he would fail as a teacher. If it weren't for his accursed shyness . . . the bane of his life! At school he had been considered slow and passive because he had never had the courage to raise his hand or call out, while during oral examinations his nervousness had often made him mix everything up.

Old Shatrov, chief of the distributing bureau at the plant, had once said to him: "What's wrong with you, Sirikh? You always look scared to death. You've got to speak up—shout people down if they start an argument! You're the dispatcher, you know!"

Andrei was always at a loss in the presence of girls, especially if they were new acquaintances. At parties he would sit silent and aloof. The girls considered him a dull bookworm who was to be treated with disdain. He was respected by those who knew him well, but these were very few.

And yet he was witty, had a fine voice, and loved fun. But his shyness, or, as his father called it, his "boorishness" often prevented him from being himself.

Andrei was not afraid of work, or that he would make a fool of himself: he knew his subject. But he couldn't help wondering how the workers would receive him. He had known many of them before; had worked beside them in the shop and worn the same oil-stained, singed overalls. Should he assume an attitude of easy familiarity? "Hullo, fellows! Let's get going!" No, that wouldn't do. He must be dignified and serious, otherwise nothing would come of their studies. A professorial impressiveness: "We will now proceed to a consideration of another aspect of the question...."

Hell! No one would ever come again. After all, the circle was to be held at the end of the working day, and he knew only too well what that meant.

Andrei tossed on his squeaky couch, breaking out in a sweat from his harassing thoughts. Or perhaps it was just too hot in the room. Everyone else was asleep; the family went to bed early so as to get up early. The house was dark and quiet, and the heat from the stove kept him from sleeping.

Andrei got up and walked barefoot to the window gleaming blue-white in the light of the moon. There he

stood until he began to shiver. When he returned at last to his warm bed, he was no longer pestered by his thoughts. He merely saw himself once more back in the shop where he had worked so long ago. Near the furnace stood an enormous pneumatic hammer which kept pounding away day and night. Inside lay glowing metal moulds waiting to be worked by the smiths. The men would light their cigarettes by picking up a mould with the pincers, the heat of the metal searing their faces. The foreman would curse them roundly for this, but he did the same thing himself, for he too never had any matches. His name was Smerdov, and he was a little, grease-stained chap with a grey, wrinkled face, like a gnome. He shouted at everyone and rushed about, doing everything himself. He seemed never to eat, sleep, or even sit down. The men feared and respected him. The very sight of his nimble little figure stimulated them to work harder. They called him "The Plague."

There had been a bright-faced girl called Galya, with blue eyes and delicate features, who worked in an adjoining shop. She wore top boots and a wadded jacket. For a long time Andrei's acquaintance with her was limited to saying hullo in the mornings and watching her when she passed through the shop. But once when he was walking down a dark corridor during the night shift, someone came rushing out of a doorway.

"Who's there?" cried an excited voice which he recognized as Galya's. "Who is it?" she repeated, coming closer.

"It's me," replied Andrei.

"There's been a big victory in Leningrad! The blockade's broken! A big victory!" she cried breathlessly, and before he knew what was happening she had flung her soft arms round his neck and kissed him swiftly and ardently on the cheek.

"Galya! How do you know?"

But she had already run off. He did not even realize that this was the first time in his life he had been kissed by a girl.

After that they always read the newspaper reports from the front together and he pointed out on the map where our armies were. Later, Galya began to work in a military hospital and went away to Leningrad, her native city.

During the war the plant had been completely blacked out at night—not a single lighted window. When one had to cross the yard during an interval the only points of light were the glow of an occasional cigarette. And through this darkness would come the dull, strained, constant hum of the machines, causing the windowpanes to vibrate.

But now everything was probably flooded with light. . . . There were such huge windows in the shops.

That evening they were celebrating “joint birthdays” in the students’ hostel. Raya Volkova, Marina Gravets and Alexei Remeshkov were the heroes of the day. Their birthdays came several days apart, but it had become the tradition to celebrate them together—it was jollier, more impressive, and more economical that way.

The party was held in the girls’ large room which had been fittingly decorated by a special “jubilee committee.” Over the door hung a large sign reading: “Only high-quality presents accepted!” It was illustrated by India ink drawings of gift suggestions, ranging from a “Moskvich” automobile to a newfangled gas range.

The walls were covered with posters, cartoons, and hastily composed jingles, while the middle of the room was dominated by a banquet table made of three desks pushed together, and notable for a variety of tableware (including plastic shaving mugs) rather than of food which consisted largely of crimson mounds of beet salad.

Above the table hung the grim announcement: "A birthday party is no luxury; it is dire necessity!"

Vadim came late. The guests were taking their places, and that noisy moment had arrived when one person discovers he has no fork, another that he has no glass, a third that he has no chair, and must squeeze on to a friend's, both landing on the floor amid general merriment.

"Scene five: enter Vadim Belov! Strike up the music!" shouted the lanky Alexei, jumping up. He was a little tipsy already; his coat was off and his tie askew. "And he's brought presents. How conscientious guests are these days!"

Vadim was immediately wedged in between the two birthday girls. Marina Gravets, chattering and laughing incessantly, saw to it that he was properly fed—she poured him out half a glass of vodka, and piled his plate with an indiscriminate mixture of salad, pickled tomatoes, sausage, and cheese. She was wearing a pretty frock, her hair was elaborately waved, her face was flushed, and her black eyes shone with joyful abandon.

"For heaven's sake, Marina!" protested Vadim. "How much of that salad do you think I can put away?"

"Every bit of it," laughed Marina. "The salad's compulsory. Must be consumed and everybody must do his share!"

On Vadim's right sat the tall red-haired Raya Volkova in a navy-blue tailored suit with two bars of ribbons pinned to the breast pocket. Like Vadim, Lagodenko, and many other students, Raya had been at the front—the war had taken four years of her life. She had volunteered as a nurse at the age of seventeen, straight from a rural school in the Tambov Region. By the end of the war she was a lieutenant. She had joined the Party at the front.

Vadim admired this calm grey-eyed girl, who was the oldest in her class. Indeed, she had won everyone's respect, and the girls in the hostel were deeply attached to her, fondly nicknaming her "Mamma."

Raya asked Vadim why he had come without Lena

"I didn't know you had invited her. Did you?"

"Of course! We called her up and asked her mother to tell her. She wasn't at the Institute," said Raya. "You were to have called for her. So you see it's all your fault. Sergei still has the flu. Lusya went to see him."

Raya was strangely grave and absent-minded. She kept narrowing her eyes as though pondering something, and took no part in the noisy conversation. Vadim noticed that Pyotr Lagodenko was missing.

"Where's Pyotr?"

Raya shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. He went off somewhere without telling anybody. He's the limit, Vadim," she said in a pained voice. "Why did he have to spoil our party? When I told him he simply must come, he said: 'A party! I'm just in the mood to turn handspings!' I told him that was just what he needed—something to distract him. I even asked him to come for my sake. But he wouldn't hear of it. 'Leave me alone, you don't understand,' he said. I simply don't know what to do. What can one say to him?"

"Perhaps it's better for him to be alone for a while," said Vadim. "He may be with Andrei. Andrei isn't here either."

"No, he isn't with Andrei."

Raya shook her head and turned away.

Vadim wanted to comfort her, but didn't know how. He realized that she wished to hide her feelings from the others and found it difficult to talk about Lagodenko. And Vadim himself, who had counted on meeting Lena here, had lost all interest in the party. When there had been nothing particular between him and Lena, he had

enjoyed such gatherings; it had been enough for him simply to be with his friends, and to have fun and joke with all the girls. Now there was only one girl for him, but she brought him more joy than all the parties lumped together, with all their girls and songs and jollity. She was not here tonight, and everything was dull and he could not force himself to be gay. There was plenty of wine, but it did not go to his head, although he hardly ate anything.

Today the long-awaited preliminary test in English had at last been given, and it formed the subject of lively discussion at the table.

"What did you write, Vadim? Did you use the gerund?"

"Only in the first exercise. I don't think I made any very bad mistakes. I asked Andrei, and he wrote the same thing."

"I know I won't get more than a 'three'," whined Galya Mamonova, a slip of a girl with fluffy hair and siren eyes "I'm so stupid—I always get everything mixed up."

Marina turned to her irritably:

"You make me sick, Galya! You're always whining, and you always get top marks."

"Yes, she's always belittling herself!" put in Lusya eagerly. "Has a gorgeous new dress made and says: 'How in the world shall I ever put on that hideous thing! I'm ugly enough as it is!' And all the while she knows she's prettier than anyone else!"

"Nonsense!" murmured Galya, blushing and dropping her eyes.

"Did you see the fix Lena Medovskaya was in today?" asked Alexei. "She was sitting in front of me at the test. Suddenly she stuck up two fingers. I couldn't make out at first what she meant. It turned out she didn't know how to do the second exercise, and I was still doing the translation...."

"Lena?" said Lusya in her cackling voice. "Nothing new in that. She's always getting other people to help her. She even seems to consider it their duty, for some strange reason. For love of her, I suppose."

"Oh, come on," said Max with a frown. "Lena's not like that, I haven't noticed...."

"You never notice anything, Max. You always sit right up in front like a hero, and don't see a thing. But we do."

"You're wrong this time, Lusya," said Marina, shaking her head decisively. "There's no denying that Lena knows her English—she's not like you. That's her strong point—subjects that just have to be learned by heart."

Vadim listened with strained attention to the talk about Lena, trying to appear unconcerned. But it seemed to him that everyone noticed his agitation and understood perfectly why he remained silent and apparently indifferent. He ought to take part in the conversation. After all, why shouldn't he speak up, since he disagreed with them, especially with that cackling Lusya? Suddenly Vadim raised his head and cleared his throat.

"You're all wrong," he said. "None of you know very much anyhow. Except Nina Fokina."

Raya smiled and said gently:

"We have nothing against Lena, Vadim. She's all right, but she's an only child, you know. She seems indifferent to everything that doesn't concern her personally. A sweet, childlike sort of indifference. We've known each other three years, but she's only come to the hostel four times, and each time with a special purpose."

"Very special," said Lusya sarcastically. "To catch a run in her stocking or borrow a hair slide."

Vadim leaned over his plate and busied himself with skinning a piece of sausage he had already skinned.

"That'll do!" shouted Alexei, rising. "Enough of this! Whose birthday is it anyhow? I'm the only one

you ought to talk about. Let's have a drink! A toast! Al-e-xei!" he warbled. "Till this is do-o-one, we'll drink no other o-o-ne!"

When the feast was over the desks were pushed to the wall and dancing began. The room was large enough to accommodate ten couples at once. Alexei, now without his tie, smiling happily, staggered about among the dancers, tripping them up and making comic remarks.

"Stop it, Alexei," cried Marina, who was dancing with a taciturn philosophy-student from the University whom she had invited. "Try to behave decently!"

"Aren't I having a birthday, Marina? The most indecent thing you can do on your birthday is to behave decently."

Vadim went over to Raya and asked her to dance. She was very pale.

"Aren't you feeling well?" he asked. "Perhaps you had better go and lie down."

"I'm all right. But why doesn't Pyotr come?"

"Don't worry, he'll come," said Vadim reassuringly. "He's sure to."

Vadim was a good dancer, though he seldom really enjoyed it. He led Raya smoothly and gently and tried steps he had almost forgotten, thinking in this way to give her some pleasure. They were glad to be dancing together. Intent on their own thoughts, neither spoke, and they found this no strain. Anyone watching them silently executing those complicated steps would have assumed that they were too absorbed in their dancing to think of anything else.

Later in the evening Rashid Nuraliyev rushed into the middle of the floor and began to perform a strange, slow, oriental dance. Everyone surrounded him, clapping their hands and calling out in unison "Aassál... Aassál" as though he were dancing the Caucasian *lezghinka*. Then they sang songs to the accompaniment of the ac-

cordion. Alexei, the accordionist, was too sleepy to hold up his head, but he played anything he was asked, and played well.

When those who lived at some distance from the hostel were making ready to go home, Lagodenko suddenly appeared. He stood in the doorway in his seaman's great-coat, sullen and unshaved, and at first no one noticed him. Raya was the first to do so, and she ran over to him.

"Oh, Pyotr's come!" cried Lusya, for some reason laughing loudly. "Better late than never!"

He nodded to everyone without speaking and sat down at the table. He refused food and drink, but took one of the expensive cigarettes Alexei had received as a birthday gift. Raya sat down beside him and for some time they talked in lowered tones. Lagodenko kept frowning and answered not with averted eyes.

The party was coming to a close. The accordion was silent, the last couple had come to a breathless halt, and someone had already said the usual:

"Honourable guests, don't you think that your hosts have had enough of you?"

Only the indefatigable Marina and Lusya and a few enthusiasts were still playing some game, like fortune-telling, or reading horoscopes. Marina would pull little pieces of paper out of a hat and Lusya would name somebody present. The papers contained proverbs, or some trite saying. They were read aloud, amid general laughter and applause.

"Who's this one for?" asked Lusya suddenly.

"Lagodenko!"

"'Everybody's out of step but the sergeant!'" read Lusya, giggling.

But nobody else laughed. They all turned to Lagodenko, who continued to sit at the desk, smoking calmly, as if he had not heard. Suddenly he got up, put on his coat, and went out of the room. Raya also got up.

"Why did you do that?" she asked Lusya indignantly. "You know what he is!"

"I didn't mean any harm. What did I say?"

"What did you say? I'd like to..." but Raya turned without finishing her sentence, and followed Lagodenko out of the room.

That was the last of the papers—the game was over. Everyone moved toward a table near the door on which coats and hats were piled. Alexei helped the girls into their things, muttering sleepily:

"The ball is over. The hum of voices has long since died down and lackeys go about extinguishing the tapers.... The guests drive away.... Such furs and diamonds!... Such hob-nailed boots!"

Vadim decided to run up to the boys' quarters on the second floor, where Lagodenko lived. He met Raya on the dark, narrow stairway.

"Is Pyotr upstairs?"

"Yes. Go and speak to him. I can't do a thing with him," she said tearfully, avoiding his eyes. "He won't say a word."

Vadim gripped her hand clumsily in the darkness and murmured: "That's all right, Raya. I'll speak to him."

Lagodenko was lying on his cot, his face to the wall. His two roommates were already asleep. Max Vilkin was sitting on the edge of his bed in the farthest corner, with a chessboard on his knees, trying to solve a problem.

"Why did you come so late?" asked Vadim, sitting down on Lagodenko's cot.

Lagodenko rolled over and looked at Vadim intensely for a moment without saying a word.

"I'm leaving for Sevastopol, Vadim," he suddenly burst out.

"What for?"

"I can always find a job as first mate, and that's what I'm going to do."

"Hm," said Vadim, after a pause. He decided to speak gently and gravely, though he didn't take Lagodenko's words seriously. "Well, why not? It's not a bad job, being a first mate. Interesting."

"Of course it's interesting," said Lagodenko defiantly. "Don't I know it?"

"You're not going anywhere, brother," thought Vadim to himself. "Just pretending, and that's why you're so irritable." Aloud, he said: "I don't suppose I can tell you anything, but I have an idea you'll change your mind tomorrow."

"Me change my mind? You don't know me," retorted Lagodenko, raising his voice. "Once I've made up my mind, I stick to it. Tomorrow I'm filing an application to be transferred to the Correspondence Department."

"The Dean will never let you leave."

"Oh yes, he will! He'll understand."

"Well," said Vadim, getting up resolutely, "I think it's a crazy idea. You have no business going anywhere. It's your job to stay right here and finish the Institute. It would be cowardly to run away."

"Cowardly?" Lagodenko jumped up. "That shows you don't understand a thing, Vadim! After that business with Kozelsky, everyone who ever had a grudge against me—and there's no denying I've set plenty of people against me, damn it all—will start paying me back. And I don't want..."

"If you've got any principles," interrupted Vadim impulsively, "and if you really think you're right, then you've got to prove it, put up a fight. Can't you see that? And not run off to be a first mate!"

"Put up a fight!" scoffed Lagodenko. "Don't shout. The fellows are asleep. I'm a sailor, understand? And I never hit below the belt; but they—? Dig up all their old grudges, even things that happened in the first year. There's to be a Komsomol meeting tomorrow."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? I'm to be put in the dock." He gave Vadim a sidelong glance and frowned. "As to the affair with Kozelsky—of course I was wrong, damn it. . . . But I was at the end of my tether. How much can a fellow stand? I suppose Max has already written an article about me for the wall newspaper. And you'll probably draw a cartoon. Something like: *The Ox and the Frog*, or *The Elephant and the Lap Dog*."

He stopped speaking and looked searchingly at Vadim. Vadim made no reply. He always found it difficult to argue with Lagodenko when the latter was upset, and neither of them could argue calmly. With a wry smile Vadim thought to himself that Lagodenko would accept his silence as a sign that he too had turned against him.

"There's no reason for going off anywhere. That's all nonsense," he said, angry with himself for being unable to convince his friend. "And what's more, you're not going!"

Lagodenko answered with unexpected tranquillity.

"Aren't I? We'll see."

Both of them were silent for a moment. Vadim remembered Raya's words: "What can one say to him?" True, nothing. Vadim sympathized with this prickly, stubborn fellow who was unquestionably right in essentials; and at the same time he was irritated by Lagodenko's self-assurance and defiant tone. This irritation prevented him from telling Lagodenko frankly what he considered right and wrong in his conduct, and giving him friendly advice. There certainly was no justification for Lagodenko's rudeness to the professor, but if Kozelsky was to be discussed at all at the meeting, Vadim would have something to say. At the present moment he didn't want to mention this to Lagodenko, afraid of making promises. Let things just take their course at the meeting. . . .

"Why didn't you come to the birthday party?" asked Vadim. "Raya was hurt."

"I can't pretend, Vadim. I can't put on a bright face when I'm in the dumps. And I prefer not to spoil other people's fun. Raya ought to understand, and not feel hurt."

He turned back to the wall in a huff and pulled the blanket up over his head.

"I'm going to sleep. Good night," he mumbled from under the bedclothes.

"Good night."

Vadim felt vexed with himself as he left Lagodenko, as if he had turned his back on a difficult task without even attempting to accomplish it.

Some time after midnight, when all the lights were out and everyone was asleep, Andrei entered the hostel. He had been delayed in town and had come to spend the night with Lagodenko.

The friendship between these two very different people had begun two years before, and in a rather amusing way. During a party at the Institute, at which an amateur performance was held, followed by dancing and games, Lagodenko, who never missed a chance of showing off his biceps, challenged the students to a contest of strength. He brought from his room a gadget with two steel springs, which the boys were to expand—first one, then both together. Several of the boys managed to expand one of the springs, but only one student pulled out both together, and he could do it only twice in succession. Then Lagodenko entered the circle of onlookers, proudly puffed out his chest, and expanded both springs six times running. He was greeted by a round of applause; Miron Mikhailovich, Dean of their department, proclaimed him champion, and the girls ran to the lunch counter to buy him a bottle of beer with the prize money.

At that moment there was a stir among the onlookers, and some students pushed forward a fat, clumsy

fellow in spectacles who kept resisting their efforts and muttering something unintelligible in a deep bass voice. It was Andrei Sirikh, whom a group of students were urging to take part in the contest. Once in the middle of the ring there was nothing for him to do but try his luck.

"Nothing will come of it. I'm not in training," he muttered, blushing and staring at the floor.

But from the ease with which he expanded the springs at the very first try, everyone could see that his chances were good. "One—two—three—four—" counted the students in unison. "Five—six," they cried excitedly. "Seven!" Lagodenko's record was broken, but Andrei Sirikh kept on. "Ten—twelve—thirte-e-en!" gasped the audience. "Fif-teen!" Andrei threw the apparatus on the floor.

"Phoooh!" he exclaimed, and walked away.

Lagodenko smiled shamefacedly. The bottle of beer remained with him because, as it turned out, the new champion didn't like beer, but this only emphasized the ignominy of Lagodenko's defeat. He gallantly shook Andrei's hand and said that the victory had been honestly won, "although it must have been easy, with such shoulders."

That marked the beginning of their friendship.

Andrei found his friend's cot in the dark and shook him by the shoulder.

"Where have you been? Why so late?" asked Lagodenko, sitting up. Apparently he had not been asleep.

"I was at my old plant. This has been a big day for me," whispered Andrei with unwonted excitement. "I was put to the test today. Remember my telling you I was going to take charge of a literary circle at the plant? My old plant. Well, today we met for the first time. We began at half past eight and finished just a little while

ago—at twelve o'clock. It's true I didn't know any of the people—mostly young folks from different shops. And one engineer who writes poetry. What a set! And did they argue! I gave them a lecture on contemporary literature. I spoke an hour and they argued two hours. Want to hear about it?"

"Go ahead!"

"Well—" Andrei lay down on the cot and covered himself with the blanket. "There's a young chap there—Baturkin—he was just a learner when I worked there. He kept asking me why the poets write so little about the workers. Those people read everything—the plant has a huge library. And they spoke about all sorts of things—asked me about Dreiser and Jack London . . . Are you asleep?"

"Not yet."

"They've got a Komsomol newspaper. I promised to help them with it and get some more of our students to help. It's sure to be interesting. The things they're doing there! I didn't recognize my own plant! Got lost on the premises—really I did. New people, new records, new machinery! Line production! Wouldn't I like to work there now, just!" He sighed happily and settled himself in bed. "All this time I've been feeling guilty towards the fellows I worked with—I left and never went back, as though I had forgotten them. But they didn't forget me. They remember me there, and that makes it doubly interesting to go back to them in a new role, and help them in a new way. You can't imagine what a grand experience it was. But why don't you say something?"

"You don't give me a chance. I've never heard you talk so much at a stretch."

"I could talk all night. Oh yes, how did the birthday party go off? Too bad I missed it!"

"It was all right."

"Well, I'll give them my presents tomorrow. Sweets for the girls, and some photographic paper for Alexei—

the kind he was looking for. There's a mechanic there named Balashov—but you're asleep, Pyotr!"

"No, I'm not, I'm thinking." After a pause, Lagodenko added: "There's to be a Komsomol meeting tomorrow. Go to sleep now, Andrei! I have something I want to think out."

Chapter 9

On Wednesday Palavin returned to the Institute. Vadim met him in the cloakroom, and together they climbed the stairs. The bell had not yet rung. On the stairway and through the corridors students were wandering singly and in groups, smoking, talking, reading the class and Institute newspapers strung in colourful array along the wall.

"How are you feeling? Better?" asked Vadim, glancing into Sergei's face, which was freshly shaved and almost rosy. "Can't say you look bad."

"The frost's given me a colour. Couldn't you have found time to pay me another visit?"

"You can't imagine what a busy week I had."

"Oh yes, I can: reports, seminars, girls..."

Sergei gave a knowing wink and threw his arm across Vadim's shoulder.

"Girls!" protested Vadim. "I spent the whole week on my paper."

"Well, if it wasn't girls, perhaps it was sports? Skating?"

Vadim looked at him in some surprise, and they both burst out laughing.

"You snake in the grass!" Vadim grabbed Sergei around the middle and pressed him against the window sill to give him a pummelling.

They were separated by Spartak Galustyan, Secretary of the Komsomol Bureau, a swarthy youth with heavy eyebrows, a mop of hair, and the brilliant black

eyes of a southerner. He was wearing his best suit, which he always wore at Komsomol meetings.

"Break it!" he cried, grabbing Vadim by the sleeve. "Belov wins by three points! Don't forget the meeting at three o'clock, fellows!"

"We won't!"

"Has it been announced in your group?"

"Yes. After the lecture yesterday."

"Well, mind you're not late!"

Acquaintances strolled over to get a light or exchange a few words with Vadim and Sergei. Some of the students greeted them from a distance by nodding or raising a hand or simply winking. Sergei had more friends than Vadim, many of them from other departments.

Just before the bell rang, Valya Mauer, a plump girl with flaxen pigtails, like a schoolgirl, came running up to Sergei.

"Sergei, Sergei! Wait a minute! Don't run away, I need you," she said, holding on to one of Sergei's buttons. "Hullo, Vadim! You know we're going to have a New Year's party, don't you, Sergei?"

"I do."

"Well, you're to write some skits for us—you know, with local colour."

"Phew!" whistled Sergei. "I can't do that."

"What do you mean, you can't? You write verse, don't you? And you're one of our most active club members and a member of the Komsomol into the bargain, and you've always taken part in..."

"Stop!" interrupted Sergei. "I can't because I'm up to my ears in work just now. I'm writing a novel."

Valya's large blue eyes expressed indignation.

"What if you are? I'm doing research on Ossetian folklore, and Vadim's writing something or other. We're all busy, but this is your social work, and you have no right..."

"Oh yes I have! Kindly let me alone," said Sergei testily, annoyed that Valya had not seemed impressed by the fact that he was writing a novel. "I have no time, can't you understand?"

"No, I can't!" exclaimed Valya belligerently. "It's disgusting!"

"Oh, really?"

"You just wait—I'll bring it up at the meeting!" threatened Valya as the bell sent her rushing off to her lecture.

"And I'll speak about how you run the club in general!" shouted Sergei after her, adding in a lowered tone: "Imagine a shrimp like her thinking she can run things!" Suddenly he turned round and called out:

"Valya! Wait a minute!"

"Well?"

"When are you getting together?"

"Next week, probably. The committee is to be elected today."

"Next week?" Sergei plucked at his upper lip as he concentrated on some thought, then said decisively: "All right, I'll come. I'll probably have finished one chapter by Monday, and I'll have to take a short rest anyway."

"That's better!"

The meeting began with a discussion of the work of the club, and preparations for the New Year's party. A high-cheekboned, curly-headed youth reported on what had already been done. The students paid little attention to him, whispering among themselves and shifting noisily on their chairs, while those in the back rows began to smoke. Spartak got up and called for order. Lena, who was sitting next to Vadim, put her elbow on the chair in front of her and listened dreamily. From the expres-

sion of her face, she might have been listening to a symphony.

The first half of the meeting passed quickly, without any particular discussion. The club council was criticized as usual, and so was the assistant director, who for two years had been promising the students to open a billiard room and procure musical instruments for a student band. The program for the New Year's party was discussed and a committee was elected including Valya Mauer, Palavin, and five others.

During the interval Sergei approached Vadim and Lena.

"Why are you two sitting so far away? Come up in front; there are two seats next to me. The fun's just going to begin."

"Come on, Vadim," said Lena.

Vadim looked at her abstractedly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why are you so down in the mouth? Nobody has brought up anything against you, have they?"

"My mother's ill. Didn't I tell you?"

"Oh yes, I remember. My mother called up the day before yesterday. Isn't she any better? You have a perfect right to leave the meeting, you know."

Vadim only frowned in reply. He was irritated by Sergei's last remark—by the speed with which he jumped to this conclusion on hearing about his mother's illness. Lena handed Vadim her bag, saying she was going to run to the lunch counter for a bite. Sergei also disappeared and Vadim went alone to the landing for a smoke.

After the interval, Lagodenko's case was discussed. Professor Kozelsky had reported to the Bureau that during his examination Lagodenko had been extremely rude, calling Kozelsky vindictive and a dogmatist in front of his assistant. As Spartak Galustyan, looking very

formidable, presented the facts, the students grew more and more restless. They began to whisper among themselves and give suppressed exclamations. Vadim caught sight of Marina Gravets and Raya sitting in the last row. Raya's face was very white and strained, and she kept glaring from under lowered brows at Galustyan.

"...the meeting is asked to consider the behaviour of Comrade Lagodenko, which has been unethical and unworthy of a Komsomol member."

A girl sitting next to Vadim whispered:

"Pyotr's always terribly rude, isn't he? He has no tact at all."

Vadim did not answer. He kept looking about in search of Lena. She had not returned to her place after the interval, but she could not have gone home without her bag.

Suddenly he saw her sitting next to Sergei in the third row, and both of them turned and gestured to Vadim to join them. He only shook his head. Apparently he must have looked very funny, for Sergei snorted and whispered something in Lena's ear that made her put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. They continued whispering and smiling. Vadim made up his mind not to look at them again.

Vadim's neighbour pulled his sleeve and said:

"Look how yellow he's gone!"

"What's that?" asked Vadim, forcing his attention back to the platform. Lagodenko was standing there—stocky, thick-necked, in his dark-blue seaman's jacket. His swarthy face with the prominent cheekbones seemed thin and drawn, as if he had been ill.

"...that's up to the meeting. I've been a Komsomol member for eight years and know what Komsomol discipline is," he was saying in a dull, weary tone, in strange contrast with his usual booming bass. "Yes, I called Kozelsky a dogmatist and said he was petty and vindictive and ought not to be teaching literature. Of course, I

should never have said such a thing during my examination. It was wrong, and I admit it. But let me tell you the whole story. I've been having trouble with Kozelsky ever since he began lecturing to us last year. I detest the way he lectures—he takes all the life out of everything—he turns the most interesting material into a dry record, a sort of inventory, or grocer's price list. And I consider it a disgrace to put the teaching of Russian literature into the hands of a man with a calculating machine for a mind. I mustn't say such things, eh? It's rude and unmannerly." Lagodenko's voice was gradually growing louder. "But why did I come to this Institute? Was it to be fed sawdust? I came here to learn; I came because I love literature, our literature, Russian literature. I came hoping that every new day would reveal some beauty that had escaped me. And instead of that, I get nothing but dates, dates, dates crammed down my throat."

A wave of laughter passed over the audience. Students called out: "That's right, Pyotr! Full steam ahead!"

"Just imagine a fellow who is in love with a girl going to see her best friend so as to hear her beauties extolled. He waits with bated breath, and all the friend can tell him is that his beloved's nose is forty-three millimetres long, she cut her first tooth in 1926, the density of her hair is so many thousand to the square inch, etc. How do you think he'd feel?"

"Stick to the point, Lagodenko!"

"What I'm saying is to the point. In the spring I failed in my examination. I don't think I was unprepared—I deserved at least a 'four.' But I thought to myself: I suppose the professor has taken a dislike to me—he's particularly strict with me, which means I must work harder. I studied all summer. In the autumn he asked me all sorts of trifling questions after I had answered the main ones, and I failed again. So I ground away for another month. Gradually I came to hate the Russian writ-

ers I used to love so much. They became my enemies. That was dreadful. In spite of my dogged persistence, there were moments when I began to feel I was losing confidence in myself. It seemed to me I would never be able to remember all those dates, those infinitesimal facts, the names and patronymics of all the characters from all the books. The fellows from the hostel who coached me for the exam began to catch me up on the simplest questions. I had lost my balance, like a ship with a hole in her keel. It was in this state that I went to take my exam for the third time. And again he failed me, this time without much difficulty. That was when I lost control. Of course I shouldn't have, I know that well enough. But somehow—" He made a hopeless gesture and ran off the platform.

Again Vadim felt a tug at his sleeve

"And now look how red he is!"

"Red, yellow—what is he, a traffic light?" said Vadim, irritably shaking off the hand.

He gazed at Spartak, trying to discover the impression Lagodenko's speech had made on him. But Spartak was impenetrable. He was sitting unnaturally erect, his long, swarthy hands clasped in front of him. It seemed to Vadim that there had been sincerity and a great deal of truth in Lagodenko's speech. They had never been close friends, he and Lagodenko, perhaps because they studied in different groups. But he had always felt attracted to the sailor. During the preceding year they had both attended an art studio, where Lagodenko painted nothing but seascapes and sea battles. Later they had met again while training for track meets. Vadim liked Lagodenko's straightforwardness, his abundance of energy, and his manliness, though he was by no means blind to his shortcomings. Lagodenko's straightforwardness often led him to be rude, his spurts of intense activity were prompted largely by excessive pride, and he was inclined to boast

of his daring and air his "sailor ways." But behind all this Vadim was able to distinguish the essential in him. Many people disliked Lagodenko: some considered him a braggart, others a bully, still others an egoist. All these judgments were extreme, and therefore erroneous. It was said that he attracted people at first, but soon estranged them and that no one could remain friends with him for long.

Vadim realized that many people disliked Lagodenko for a frankness that was blatant and offensive. He had a constant tendency to tell everyone the whole truth, in big things as well as in small ones, and it is often the trifling truths that are the most painful. He sensed that Lagodenko felt kindly disposed towards him, but attached little importance to this, for Lagodenko's likes and dislikes were somewhat incomprehensible. One thing Vadim clearly saw: Lagodenko admired those who were physically strong and healthy. "I can't stand puny creatures," he told him. "I don't trust them. A forearm like *yours*, now --how many kilograms can you lift with your right? I wouldn't mind having you in a landing party under my command."

He had weights and an "expander" at the hostel with which he trained every morning, following his exercises with a cold rubdown.

Such was Pyotr Lagodenko, former commander of a torpedo boat, now a third-year student and a rank-and-file Komsomol member. At the present moment he was sitting motionless, one elbow on the arm of his chair, gazing fixedly at the people on the platform who were speaking about him.

They were expressing various opinions. As soon as Lagodenko had finished talking, the floor was taken by Kamkova, Kozelsky's assistant. She said that while Lagodenko's speech may have had great emotional appeal, his point of view was wrong. He was opposed to a thor-

ough mastery of facts and material. The dates, names, and events which he so disdainfully compared to a "grocer's price list"—what are they if not the sum total of that concrete knowledge without which there can be no true erudition? Lagodenko represented a superficial type which should have no place in a Soviet institution of higher learning. And it was to be hoped that the Komsomol organization would severely punish him for his slanderous attack on Professor Kozelsky.

She was followed by Maxim Vilkin, who gently reproved Kamkova for going a little too far. No one denied the necessity of a knowledge of facts. That would be foolish indeed.

"I am not an admirer of Lagodenko," he went on. "He and I often have disagreements, though we are roommates. He's a hard person to get along with. But there's no denying an element of truth in his criticism of Kozelsky. Boris Matveyevich Kozelsky really is dry, and a stickler for detail. He spends hours on end searching for Tolstoy's mistakes in logic, and he dissects authors like an anatomist. Sometimes that sort of thing is interesting, sometimes dull, but in either case it doesn't give one very much. This, however, is no excuse for Lagodenko's rudeness."

Vilkin proposed giving Lagodenko a simple reprimand. Two girls then got up and attacked Lagodenko's "uninvited advocate." They demanded that Lagodenko be given a *severe* reprimand, with the warning that any further offence would mean expulsion, reminding their hearers that Lagodenko had been penalized in his first year for fighting. They went on to say that Lagodenko's speech had been hypocritical and full of false pathos. Lagodenko was just pretending to be sorry; actually he did not regret his conduct in the least. Marina Gravets, on the contrary, insisted that a severe reprimand would be too harsh. Komsomol members must help people to

rectify their errors—not just punish them. Someone else got up and said that a severe reprimand was not only a punishment; it was also a means...

The meeting was dragging out interminably. Lagodenko's roommates testified that he had studied harder for the exam than anyone else, sitting over his books night after night. Marusya, the librarian, said Lagodenko was one of her most insatiable readers, that he had worn out three library cards in one term. Only four of the five members of the Komsomol Bureau were present—the fifth had left Moscow on business for the District Komsomol Committee. Spartak, Marina and Gortsev were for a simple reprimand; Nina Fokina, the fourth member, for a severe reprimand.

After a short speech by Andrei Sirikh, who was too nervous to speak convincingly, Palavin took the floor. "This'll be the end of Pyotr," thought Vadim anxiously. Everyone knew that Lagodenko and Palavin were not friends. Both of them were prominent figures at the Institute, both of them enjoyed being in the limelight. Lagodenko had often said to Vadim: "Why are you so friendly with that Palaverer? He's not your sort." Palavin called Lagodenko a comic-opera admiral. It was he who had made the famous remark: "Lagodenko's like a mug of beer—first you have to blow off the froth..."

"It seems to me, comrades," Sergei began with an impressive little cough, "that we are on the wrong tack. Instead of considering Lagodenko's behaviour, we have begun discussing Professor Kozelsky's methods of teaching. Even if it is a matter worth considering, this is certainly neither the time nor the place. The whole question of Kozelsky, it seems to me, is just another example of the spirit of cheap opposition we don't seem able to shake off. There is nothing we enjoy so much as criticizing our professors—and how cocksure our criticism is! We don't like this, and we don't like that, and we won't allow our-

selves to be taken in by anyone! We! We! And who are 'We' after all? If you take a better look, you find that we are ignoramuses, quite incapable of offering any serious criticism. We only make a lot of noise and clamour. To-day we'll attack Kozelsky and tomorrow we'll start on Krechetov. Well, and what's the result of all this? Nothing but interference with the normal course of work and an unpleasant sort of civil war among the students. We're here to study, and that's how we should spend our time—studying. Studying as hard as we can!

"And now a word about Lagodenko. I have known him for a long time. To be frank, I don't like him. Modesty can hardly be called one of his outstanding features. He's too flashy, too forward. Oh, I know people say that's because he's a sailor—a man of the high seas. How many times have I heard him say: I served all through the war—from the first shot to the last—three wounds and five decorations! And now I've come here to study—left Sevastopol and all my friends behind, exchanged two batmen and a commander's salary for a cot in a hostel. And all because I want to study, because I 'thirst for knowledge.' There's a hero for you! And we're all expected to do him homage. . . ."

"When did I ever say such a thing?" cried Lagodenko from where he was sitting.

"Don't interrupt. I didn't interrupt you," said Palavin, and went straight on. "But strangely enough, our homage is not forthcoming. By no means!" He spoke calmly, shrugging his shoulders as if in astonishment. "If I am not mistaken, we too were in the army, we too were decorated, and we too are now attending lectures, taking exams, and leading a student life. I don't find anything remarkable in this. To be sure, there are students among us who never fought, who came here straight from factories and schools. But does that give us a right to set ourselves above them, Lagodenko? Perhaps you did ren-

der special services, perhaps you fought with particular valour, but why crow about it all the time? Why must you be forever advertizing your exploits? It's true, Comrade Lagodenko, that our country never forgets services rendered, but that doesn't excuse anyone for becoming lazy and resting on his laurels. For the third time you've failed to pass your literature exam, and now it turns out the professor's at fault. There's something wrong with the way he lectures—too dry, not enough sea breeze, I suppose. . . . And then you go so far as to insult Prof. Kozelsky at the examination, calling him a dogmatist, even saying that he's sheer ballast in the world of literature. Don't laugh, Comrade Mauer! There's nothing funny about it! I consider the behaviour of Lagodenko unworthy of a Komsomol member and demand that he be fittingly punished. And I didn't like the way Andrei Sirikh spoke. I have the greatest respect for Andrei, but in this case I think he spoke without principle and not like a Komsomol member. He was influenced by his friendship for Lagodenko. He has no right to speak as he did about our professors, especially about Kozelsky! Sirikh is taking the wrong path and should be warned. As for Lagodenko, he must be punished. He must be taught not only to respect his professors, but to live peacefully with his fellow students as well." Sergei raised his voice and kept punctuating his words by striking the desk with his index finger. After a pause, he concluded by saying: "However, I too think it would be too harsh to give him a severe reprimand. I'm for a simple reprimand."

While listening to Sergei's speech, Vadim had decided that he must take the floor, and had already risen to do so when he heard Sergei's concluding remark. It came as such a surprise that he sat down again. Everyone was astonished. One of the members of the Bureau suggested putting an end to the speeches and taking a vote. But Vadim got up again and asked for the floor.

"Any objections?" said Spartak, addressing the audience. "Very well, Belov, only make it brief."

Vadim mounted the platform. At first he felt the usual embarrassment on finding himself confronted by a roomful of upturned faces. He was aware that Sergei was gazing at him with calm curiosity, that Lena was smiling at him, that Lagodenko was looking tense and sullen, his lips compressed, his eyes weary, his cheeks sunken. Everyone was looking at him and wondering what he, the last to speak, would say.

"I wouldn't have spoken, but for Palavin's speech," he began slowly, struggling to control his voice. "Palavin tried to prove that this was not the time or place to speak about Kozelsky, but he himself and everyone else has spoken about him. Two questions have been raised, one concerning Lagodenko, the other Kozelsky. First I shall speak about Lagodenko. I too have known Pyotr for some time—more than two years. I remember his arriving at the Institute straight from Sevastopol. He brought with him a sailor's pack containing a pair of boxing gloves and a copy of Lermontov. I remember the hours he spent telling us his experiences defending Odessa, fighting at Eltigen, Kerch, and other places. They were fascinating experiences and he told them well—exceptionally well. And he immediately became popular, remember? And he was a good student; he never got a low mark until he reached Kozelsky, in his fourth semester. He's very capable, I consider, though there's no denying he has his faults. Sometimes he's rude and overbearing, and he's not too modest." Here Vadim turned to Lagodenko. "And how you, a man of military training, could ever have allowed yourself to say such things to your professor is more than I can understand. Certainly it's not up to me to teach you, a lieutenant and former commander, the importance of discipline. It makes no difference what you think of Kozelsky—no difference at all. At present he's

your teacher and adviser, and you have no right to be rude to him. At the front—well, you know how such things are dealt with at the front. I'm quite certain you would never have taken such liberties at the front. If you object to Kozelsky on principle, act according to the rules. Take it up with the Komsomol or Party Bureau, speak out, prove your point! That's the only thing to do. At present you're waging a silly sort of guerrilla warfare. It's quite possible that I too have objections to Kozelsky, and very serious objections, but even so I think you were wrong and deserve a reprimand.

"Now about Kozelsky. This problem is more complicated, and has arisen from no cheap spirit of opposition, as Palavin said, but by the fact that all of us are deeply concerned about our work. Palavin resorted to demagoguery when he said that today the students would attack Kozelsky, tomorrow Krechetov. No one has a word to say against Krechetov, or Simbirsky, or any of our other professors. But many of us object to Kozelsky. Because his lectures are dull. Year after year he keeps repeating the same things—I don't suppose he's changed a single word of his lectures for twenty years. Is it possible to keep saying the same thing over and over for twenty years? Yes, it is, if the only thing you offer students is a dry description of literary form and a bare record of biographical facts. Those of us who belong to the S.R.S. know that even there Kozelsky is unable to make the work interesting. He avoids all heated discussion and argument, and hardly touches on Soviet literature, apparently considering it unworthy of serious study, incapable of augmenting 'factual knowledge.' That is the sheerest formalism. Yes, we accuse Kozelsky of formalism! I propose taking up the question of Kozelsky's methods of teaching with the Dean. And we will prove our point to the Council of Studies, lecture notes in hand!"

"You never take notes at Kozelsky's lectures!" shouted someone in the audience.

"I'll borrow yours," replied Vadim, and left the platform.

He was conscious of other cries and of a general commotion in the hall, above which came the loud, peremptory voice of Spartak crying: "Order, comrades! Order!" Suddenly everyone fell silent. As Vadim sat down he saw Sasha Levchuk, class Party Secretary, limping toward the platform, leaning heavily on his stick. He was a short, dark-haired young man in a closely-buttoned military tunic.

His speech was brief:

"I don't know why you should make such a stir," he said, although there was no longer any stir. "What Belov said was right and very important. The question of Professor Kozelsky's teaching methods is a very serious one, and obviously it cannot be decided at this meeting. The important thing is that it has been raised. We must make a thorough study of it and bring it up before the Council of Studies. We shall do so. As for Lagodenko, I don't think he deserves a severe reprimand. A reprimand is enough. And that, it seems, is the opinion of the majority. So let's end the discussion and vote."

The majority voted for a reprimand. Vadim's proposal to take up the question of Kozelsky with the Dean was also accepted.

The meeting was over. Vadim saw Lagodenko quickly pushing his way through the crowd, looking at no one, and wiping the sweat from his brow. Presently Raya followed him out.

Someone touched Vadim's elbow. It was Lusya Voronkova.

"Has Kozelsky been mentioned in the papers?" she asked in a lowered voice.

"Why? In what connection?"

"In connection with formalism."

"I don't know. I don't think so. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered."

Vadim felt tired. His head was aching from the stuffiness of the room, the incessant talk, and the nervous strain of addressing a large audience. But he was glad Pyotr had been given the milder punishment, and that he himself had had the majority behind him. He felt he had come off victorious.

In the cloakroom he was approached by Sergei.

"Could you offer a demagogue a cigarette?" he asked with a conciliatory smile.

Vadim held out his open cigarette case.

"You dug into me pretty hard," said Sergei.

"Not nearly hard enough. I might have mentioned your once saying that attending Kozelsky's lectures was like serving a sentence of hard labour. Didn't you say that?"

"What if I did?"

"Or that you were always cutting the classes of your favourite professor."

"Well, what of it?" Sergei retained his amiable smile, but a harsh note entered his voice. "You might have said even worse things about me, my dear Vadim. Just as I might have about you. After all, we know each other very well. But we aren't children."

Vadim stood facing the mirror and putting on his coat without replying. Sergei stood behind him, addressing his frowning reflection in soft, condescending tones.

"Do you intend speaking against Kozelsky at the Council of Studies?"

"If necessary."

"My, what a public figure you've become!" laughed Sergei, adjusting Vadim's collar. "That's to be welcomed, of course. But why go snapping at your friends?"

"Your friends," repeated Vadim as though to himself with a little laugh. Most unpleasant of all was the fact that Sergei was his friend. They were bound by close ties, and this made Vadim all the more sensitive to anything false in Sergei's behaviour. Others, while disagreeing with him, had nevertheless found Sergei's speech clever and amusing, but Vadim had been deeply incensed by it.

"It was unfair to make such a speech," he said angrily, without looking at Sergei. "You did it because you dislike Lagodenko."

"That's not true!" exclaimed Sergei hotly. "And it had nothing to do with what I said. Didn't I come out against a severe reprimand?"

Vadim gave a wave of his hand.

"Don't try to fool me. I saw right through you—first you said everything you could to discredit him, then, sensing that the students were not with you, you did an about-face."

"What rot! You must have some sort of an obsession, Vadim—you're imagining things." Seeing Lena approaching, he broke off. "Come on! I don't want to discuss this here."

The three walked to the gateway in silence, isolated from each other by their thoughts. When they reached the street, Sergei said a curt good-bye and ran to the bus stop.

"Have you two quarrelled?" asked Lena anxiously.

"No. How did you like his speech?"

"Do you think I listened?" laughed Lena superciliously. "The same thing over and over. Why do they hold such boring meetings?"

"Sergei behaved as badly as you did. You both sat there giggling throughout the entire meeting. I told him the truth to his face and he took offence. Good-bye, Lena." He handed her her bag. "I suppose you're turning off here."

"Aren't you seeing me home?"

"I'm tired somehow. Forgive me."

They said good-bye and Vadim quickly made his way through the noisy evening crowd. A dry, smarting wind struck him in the face. The first snow had not yet fallen.

He was borne along by a feeling of victory, but at the same time he felt that today's battle was the precursor of more difficult and more important battles to come.

Chapter 10

In the beginning of December Vadim's mother fell ill. For some time she had been suffering from a cough and headaches and general indisposition. At first they thought it was simply the flu. When she grew worse and had to remain in bed, her doctor called in the district lung specialist, who diagnosed pleurisy. Vera Fadeyevna completely lost her appetite and became very weak. Day after day she lay in her bed near the window, pale and thin, with dark circles under her eyes, reading Veresayev—one volume for almost two weeks.

Her friends from the Ministry of Agriculture often dropped in to see her. They would come straight from work, always pressed for time, but managing in their brief visits to tell her the news. They all brought her the same gifts—tangerines and apples. They would dash into the kitchen and cook something, or wash the dishes. They offered advice and recounted cases similar to Vera Fadeyevna's which always had comforting endings. Vadim was driven to distraction by their endless talk, the sympathetic glances they cast in his direction, and their whispers in the hall: "Has the doctor been? What did he say?"

Doctor Gorn, the district lung specialist spoke at length and on every conceivable topic. Tall, round-shouldered and red-whiskered, he would noisily enter the room in his enormous felt boots, carrying a ridiculously small

bag, like a lady's, and begin booming away in his jovial, bass voice.

"Well, how are we today? Still at that book of yours? Tsk, tsk! Is that the way to place the lamp? You take no care of your eyes at all, and you'll be needing them for another forty years at least. Where's our temperature chart? Ah! So it's Veresayev you're reading, eh? A very fine author—very thorough. Have you taken the medicine I prescribed yesterday? Veresayev was very fond of making the *Homo sapiens* run about naked, with all his weaknesses exposed. That was the doctor in him. We're a rude, shameless lot. . . . Tomorrow I'll send a nurse to give you an injection. Let's see now, what was it I wanted to add to that prescription?"

He continued talking as he wrote the prescription, glancing up every now and then at the meek and silent Vera Fadeyevna.

"But you mustn't read too much. Not more than an hour or two a day. Listen to the radio—there are fine children's programs in the morning. In the evening you might listen to some music, perhaps to an opera; in the daytime to a lecture, one of those from the series called 'What Is Rain?' or 'The Life of the Bee.' Mind you don't forget to take these powders. In another month I shall be inviting you to go skating with me on the Petrovka Rink."

In the bathroom, as he conscientiously washed his large hands—the hands of a manual labourer—he would ask Vadim about his studies at the Institute and talk enthusiastically about sport. He was a hockey and football fan.

"Funny, isn't it? I spend my life curing other people, but I can't seem to cure myself of this mania. I was at the game again on Sunday. Marvellous! There's not a show on earth to compare with a good hockey game! I'm

convinced that hockey and football are the ballet of the 20th century."

"Fyodor Ivanovich," interrupted Vadim insistently, "are you still unable to say anything definite about my mother?"

"It looks to me like pleurisy, my boy. That is, I'm sure it's pleurisy. But—well, I'm thinking of asking Professor Andreyev to have a look at her. He's an expert diagnostician. If you remember—but how could you remember? There used to be a famous professor...."

Life was hard for Vadim during those days. The hardest moments of all were those in the morning when he left for the Institute, left for the whole day, leaving his mother alone. Vadim got up very early to make breakfast for himself and three meals for his mother—he had learned to cook in the army. He began fussing about the kitchen while his mother was still asleep, cautiously tiptoeing back and forth from the kitchen to the room. She would wake up when he placed the porridge and stewed fruit on the little table beside her bed.

Vera Fadeyevna was always afraid he would be late for lectures on her account. The minute she opened her eyes she would ask in a frightened voice:

"What time is it, Dima?"

He would take his mother's temperature and wash the breakfast dishes, glancing through the morning paper the while. After that it was time for him to go. Vera Fadeyevna always pretended to have fallen asleep again. But Vadim would expose her deception by saying in a loud, unnaturally cheery voice:

"Well, it's time for me to be going, Mum."

"Are you still here? Hurry, son, or you'll be late! What are you thinking of!" she would exclaim with a feeble effort to seem angry.

Vadim would say he had "loads of time" as he leisurely put on his coat. But as soon as the door closed

behind him he would take the steps three at a time like a schoolboy, run for the bus, jump on when it had already started, and reach the Institute in a lather, half a minute before the bell rang.

Doctor Gorn gave Vadim an official paper excusing him from lectures, and Vadim used this on the days when Vera Fadeyevna was feeling particularly bad.

Unfortunately Vera Fadeyevna's condition did not improve, and no final diagnosis had been established. This gave rise to the worst possible conjectures. And then midyear examinations were imminent.

Yes, the midyear examinations were only a few weeks off—three, two, one! In the middle of December, Spartak Galustyan called a meeting of the Komsomol Bureau to discuss preparations for the examinations and consider a question raised by Andrei Sirikh.

After the lecture Vadim dropped into the library to while away the time till the meeting of the Bureau. He had another reason for going there: to meet Lena. An indefinable change had taken place in their relations ever since he had refused to see Lena home after the Komsomol meeting. For some reason they had stopped talking to each other. On the first day this had occurred as if by chance; they themselves were not yet sure whether they should show their feelings. On the second day they were sure, and both assumed a stubborn attitude. On the third they refused to notice each other as a matter of principle. And so, without having quarrelled, they were estranged, and the reason was not that Vadim had refused to see Lena home. Not at all.

One day before the Komsomol meeting, Spartak had said to him:

"Something's wrong with you, old chap. You disappear the minute the lecture's over and there's no finding you anywhere. You let an issue of the wall newspaper pass without doing a stroke of work, and you

haven't written that paper you promised for the journal. What's up?"

"I don't know. Nothing particular," said Vadim, frowning because he knew what Spartak was hinting at. "I've just grown lazy—have to take myself in hand."

"Watch out!" warned Spartak, shaking a finger. "The examination's in the offing, and here you are—" he waved his hand in the air vaguely. "Why haven't you written that paper?"

"I'm working on it. It's going slowly."

He hadn't touched his paper for the last ten days. The excuse he gave himself was obvious enough: Mother was ill. But the real reason was—Lena. He spent all his time thinking and worrying about her; she gave him no peace even when he was alone at home, or at the library. Relations with her were too complicated. Was that as it should be? Should love, if it were true love, the simple and courageous love about which so much has been written—be a torture and a hindrance? He had read somewhere. "Love is the desire for that which does not exist." That was how it was with the Montagues and the Capulets, Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina. Love for them was life itself, and life—a torture. The tragedy of their suffering lay in the fact that, while fighting for their love, they fought for life itself. This had been true in the past, in times gone by.

"Love is the desire for that which does not exist, but will one day come into being." That was a purer conception, and a truer one. The difficulty lay in the fact that there were so many people, and each must have his own love. The difficulty lay in the multitude of these people, in the strange interweaving of lives and circumstances, in chance words, and in the eternal, irrepressible aspiration toward the new and the better. Why should it be Lena? What was so extraordinary about her? Why not Raya, or Marina, or that girl in the fur coat he met every

morning at the bus stop (they were so used to seeing each other that they had begun to exchange nods)?

Once Lagodenko had said to him:

"Are you thinking of getting married?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Judging by the colour of your face, my guess must be right."

Vadim hated Lagodenko's habit of butting into people's private affairs—the habit of one who prided himself on "always telling people the truth to their faces." And now he recoiled.

"Well, what of it?" he said.

"I'm very fond of you, Dima," said Lagodenko seriously. "And you mustn't mind my frankness. After all, I'm older than you and more experienced. So don't take offence. I wanted to say that when a woman's nothing but a woman to you, it's not enough. Anyone but a genius would see that."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, I do. I have an instinct for such things. She's a nice kid, and she'll grow into a beauty after she's married. But she's—how shall I put it..." he paused, searching for the right word. "She's the butterfly type, Dima."

"You think so?" repeated Vadim mechanically.

"Yes. She has nothing of her own to offer—nothing but her curls. All her life she'll keep taking from you, without offering anything in return. You need quite a different sort of woman. Although who can tell? You're the one to make the choice."

"I am," said Vadim superciliously. "And I'll make it."

Whenever his friends broached this subject, Vadim became touchy and mistrustful. But what they said sank deep into his mind and caused him uneasiness for a long time afterwards. One day a neighbour met Vadim and Lena on the street; that evening he told Vadim he had seen him with "a glamour girl" and wanted to know

all about her. He was hurt that Vadim had not introduced him to Lena. Max Vilkin had been hopelessly in love with her for a long time. She herself had told Vadim of the lengthy love letters he had written her when they were both first-year students, and that she had answered them with phrases copied out of her English book. Other girls considered Lena superficial and not very clever, but Vadim did not take their opinions seriously. Ivan Antonovich jokingly referred to her as "the nymph."

But what did it matter what others thought of her? No one else really knew her. He alone could understand her, he alone must get to the bottom of things, trusting his own judgment. Of course, she had not served at the front and gone through the things a girl like Raya Volkova had. She was neither as clever and erudite as Nina Fokina, nor as pretty as Isabella Usachenko (the portrait of this second-year student had recently appeared on the cover of the magazine *Ogonyok*, and now she was swamped by letters from admirers). No, she was just Lena, but —no other girl had such truthful brown eyes, or such a voice, or such a laugh....

He was the first to break the ice. Much as he despised people who wrote to their friends during lectures, "like boarding school misses," he wrote Lena a note saying: "Are you still angry with me?" He watched her put the paper aside without reading it and continue taking notes of the lecture. She went on writing for a long time. When at last the professor paused, Lena opened the note where it lay on the desk, without picking it up, so that that nosy Lusya Voronkova who was sitting next to her could read it too. Without glancing at Vadim, Lena shrugged her shoulders, crumpled the note in three fingers, and tossed it into a drawer. She did not write an answer.

During the break Vadim said not a word to her, did not even turn in her direction. He heard her laughing with her friends and chattering with Sergei as she sat

on the window sill at the end of the corridor. She was seen with Sergei very often these days; together they would walk up and down the corridor between lectures, together they went to the lunch counter and to the library. All of this was done merely to hurt Vadim; Sergei, of course, meant nothing to her. Sometimes Vadim even felt sorry for her. She was just torturing herself by playing this game, trying with all her might to appear calm and unconcerned, while at night, when no one could see her, she probably wept into her pillow. Silly girl!

As usual after lectures, the library was crowded, and as noisy as a library dare become. A queue of students exchanging books stood at the librarians' desk; a post-graduate student was attempting to slip in ahead of the others, a freshman was diffidently allowing everyone else to go first. The library assistants were rushing about the stacks like squirrels, climbing ladders and calling out in dull, official voices:

"*Love and Intrigue* is not to be taken out of the library. This is the last copy."

"Do you want *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with an introduction?"

"I won't give you Shakespeare! You haven't brought back Isakovskiy, have you? Well, you won't get Shakespeare until you bring back Isakovskiy! No, it's no use asking!"

Lena was sitting at a table by the window turning over the pages of the *Crocodile*. Vadim had a book checked to his card and went over to her table.

"Funny?" he asked, glancing over her shoulder.

Lena nodded without raising her head. Vadim sat down next to her and opened his book. For a while he said nothing, watching her out of the corner of his eye. A wisp of hair, golden and gleaming in a ray of sunlight, had fallen over her forehead, and it waved slightly whenever she turned a page. Her whole profile was lighted

by the sun, even to her eyelashes, even to the delicate down on her cheeks. As Vadim watched her he felt all his resentment fading away, until it seemed as trivial and insubstantial as the motes dancing in sunlight; it faded from mere contact with her breath, leaving nothing but this imperious, torturing longing for her, a longing which he could not resist, and saw no reason for resisting. He touched her arm and asked, with unexpected joy and relief:

"What's on your mind, old lady?"

"Why can't you use ordinary language?" said Lena, raising her calm, amber eyes, narrowed in the sunlight. "I hate those old ladies and old men of yours. They ceased to be amusing long ago."

"Sorry. But what are you sulking about?"

"I'm not sulking. And you ought to know why."

He failed to catch the incongruity of her answer, and after a moment's pause he murmured unhappily:

"Well, all right—forgive me."

"Forgive you?" Lena smiled and looked at Vadim with a coquettish flash of white teeth. "Very well. In consideration of former services. I'll forgive you this time. But don't let it happen again."

"Thank the Lord, though I'm sure I don't know what I'm guilty of."

"Oh, you don't? Then I take back my forgiveness."

But she didn't take it back, and immediately suggested going to see a new film. But Vadim said in hollow tones that he couldn't because he had to go to a meeting of the Bureau.

"There, you see!" exclaimed Lena. "You always find something more important. You don't really have to be at that meeting, do you?"

"No, but I..."

"Be specific. Must you be at that meeting or not? Are you a member of the Bureau?"

Vadim sighed and said deprecatingly:

"You know I'm not a member of the Bureau, but I promised Spartak to be present. I gave him my word, understand? I didn't know—"

"Oh, so you gave him your word, did you?" Lena shook her head with mock seriousness. "That's another matter. Of course you must go if you gave him your word!"

At that moment Palavin entered the library with a pile of books under one arm.

"You here, Dima? They're looking for you downstairs, the Bureau—"

"I know. I'm going," said Vadim. "Let's make it tomorrow, Lena?"

"Tomorrow? I don't know." Lena shrugged her shoulders dubiously. "Tomorrow I have my vocal study and some other things to attend to—"

"Well, just as you like," said Vadim. "Good-bye!"

He went out, and when he had reached the stairs he heard Lena say—or did he only imagine it?—"Are you free now, Sergei, or must you be at the meeting too?" Sergei made some reply and both of them laughed. Vadim's heart contracted painfully. Formerly Lena had flirted with Sergei in his presence to make him wince, but this time she did it when he had gone away, and could neither see nor hear her! But perhaps she had said it intentionally, so that he would hear it on the other side of the door. Of course! But no, she had not said it in a loud voice; she had spoken in a normal tone. And he had overheard it by mere chance.

Cut to the quick, he slowly descended the stairs. There was nothing he wanted now—neither to go to a cinema with Lena, nor to attend this meeting of the Bureau which he had looked forward to so eagerly.

The meeting was held in the Komsomol Committee room on the second floor. Galustyan and the Bureau mem-

bers were there, and so were Sasha Levchuk, Komsomol organizers from all the groups, and a few others who, like himself, had been specially invited because of the importance of the questions under discussion.

First they talked about preparations for the coming examinations. Long, vehement speeches were made. Spartak Galustyan belaboured lax Komsomol organizers, instructing them to draw up a list of students who were behind in their studies and immediately assign good students to coach them. . . . Vadim listened halfheartedly. He was gazing out of the window in the hope of seeing Lena: would she leave the Institute alone, or with Sergei? The entrance door kept banging and a stream of students poured constantly across the yard to the gate. Gradually the stream thinned—couples sauntered down the walk, single students rushed off. But Lena was not to be seen. Apparently he had missed her.

Now Spartak Galustyan was introducing the second question:

"We've already made a beginning, comrades," he announced proudly, "and today we must discuss how we can develop our efforts, go in for 'serial production,' so to speak. Andrei Sirikh will tell us what he has done."

Having missed part of Spartak's speech, Vadim did not understand what they were talking about. Andrei began to describe first some literary circle, then the plant where he had worked during the war and the young workers at that plant. Ah, now he got the point! The Bureau was suggesting that they should get in touch with the Komsomol members at some large plant and assume literary patronage over them, so to speak, delivering lectures and holding study circles. Andrei was already taking charge of such a circle at a large machine-building plant.

When Spartak again took the floor, Vadim was all ears. During their first and second years, Vadim and

Spartak had been great friends. One summer they had hiked through the Caucasus together; they had gone along the Georgian Military Highway, visited the land of Colchis, the cities of Tbilisi and Erevan, and even reached Lake Sevan, the final point in their tour. For ten unforgettable days they had lived on Lake Sevan, visited the construction site of the Sevan Power Station and climbed the mountains along the shore—vivid sun-baked mountains, like everything else in Armenia. The scorched peaks of these mountains breathed of antiquity, of the ancient Medes, the legendary Parthia, the roar of battle elephants, and the old-fashioned frock coat of Vikenti Lvovich, professor of Ancient History. When the two students were ready to leave they had only enough money to buy their tickets home. From Baku to Moscow they lay on bare third-class bunks, their chief nourishment being huge Caucasian cucumbers and cheap “Vostok” cigarettes. It was an unforgettable summer!

The next year Spartak got married. His wife was a student of the Power Institute and lived in the hostel. Vadim liked her—she was a quiet, slender girl with a heavy black plait, but she took Spartak away from him, or perhaps it was not she, but the new and awe-inspiring life she brought with her. So Vadim and Spartak grew apart. At the beginning of the year Spartak had been elected Secretary of the Third-Year Komsomol Bureau, and he energetically undertook his new duties. Altogether he had no time to see his friends except at meetings and lectures. Every day Spartak had some pressing business to attend to, either a Komsomol Committee meeting, or a Party Bureau meeting, or a District Committee conference, or a sitting of the Council of Studies at which he was obliged to be present. He was always rushing off somewhere, talking to the people on the run—mere fragments of sentences. New words appeared in his vocabulary, new gestures.

Now, for instance, he was resolutely cleaving the air with his palm. His swarthy smooth-shaven face, flushed like a little boy's, looked very severe, and there was a frown on his brow. Spartak Galustyan, this slender youth in a baggy black suit, with a thin neck and clear-cut, youthful features, had the rare quality of never caring what people thought of his appearance. But he was very much concerned about what they thought of his opinions and decisions.

At present he was having an argument with Pichugina, the Komsomol organizer of the third group, who was afraid that undertaking such responsible social work at factories and plants would have a bad effect on the studies of some Komsomol members. The students had plenty to do as it was.

"Don't try to frighten us, Comrade Pichugina!" said Spartak, his round black eyes rolling ominously. "We have no intention of spending all our time at the plants. Social work never did anybody any harm."

"It's done you harm. You haven't taken your exam in Logic yet!"

"Nonsense!" said Spartak with a wave of his hand. "My social work had nothing to do with that. And besides, I did take Logic. But that's not the point. Can't you see that when a person lives for one year, two years, three years, within the walls of an institution like ours, in an atmosphere of seminars and curriculums and library whispers and volcanic eruptions that occur twice a year—midyear and spring exams—he gradually loses touch with the life outside. Of course, he reads the papers, listens to the radio, makes fine speeches on the international situation and political economy. But the life of the country, that seething life—" here Spartak paused for breath. "Understand what I'm getting at? He doesn't feel the coal dust on his face, nor the heat of the blasting furnaces on his arms. Life passes him by. You say:

but we're still students; we're reserve forces, to be used in future five-year plans. That's true. But still we could do more for our country than we're doing. We already have a certain amount of knowledge and experience. Why should it lie idle for four years? Because we're studying? Everybody's studying. Formerly some people studied others worked. Now everybody studies and everybody works. Our social work here at the Institute is not enough—wall newspapers, club lectures, parties and entertainments. They're all for our own benefit...."

"Don't we work as agitators during election campaigns? We have a very hard-working group of agitators," said someone in injured tones. "Aren't you being too hard on us?"

"Perhaps. But even so—" again Spartak's palm cleaved the air, "we don't do enough. Remember Lenin saying that Komsomol members '... should spend every spare hour in improving the vegetable gardens, or in organizing the education of young people in some mill or factory....'

"We mustn't limit our efforts to making fine speeches and resolutions. The next wall newspaper must have an article about today's meeting and about plans for the future. Remember that, Vilkin! I'll write the article."

Vadim listened to Spartak with growing interest. Spartak said nothing that was a revelation to him. For a long time Vadim had recognized the truth of what he said, but now he felt that this dry, lifeless truth had suddenly sprung to life and touched him to the very depths of his being. Galustyan was right. They saw little and knew little of actual life. Take himself, for instance—Vadim Belov who could name by heart the major happenings of the year on five continents, and who knew more than most of the others about what was happening inside the country—what was being rehabilitated, what large construction jobs undertaken, what new cities being

built—well, this Belov, had he done anything of any importance during the past two-and-a-half years except shine in his studies and draw cartoons for the wall newspaper? Oh, but he had been having a rest after returning from the front! (Others had spent five whole years at the front!) He had been having a rest—a very good rest—too good a rest, damn it all!

Never in his life had he seen a large plant. The iron forge in Tashkent with the clay wall around it didn't count. Never in his life had he, a citizen of the largest industrial country in the world, been inside a factory shop.

"Why don't you say something, Belov?" said Spartak, turning to him suddenly. "It's you we're thinking of sending to the plant to get in touch with the Komsomol organization. You and Andrei Sirikh."

Vadim was so surprised that he stood up.

"All right. I'll go," he said.

The thought flashed through his mind that if they did go the next day and Lena still wanted to go to the cinema he would again have to refuse her. And suddenly he realized that Lena had been right, after all: many of the things that interested him did not interest her in the least.

"Send five fellows," advised Levchuk "That will look better. Send Palavin, for instance. He always makes an impression with that pipe of his."

"They'll take him for a professor!" laughed Marina Gravets.

"All the better! Well, so it's Sirikh, Belov, Nina Fokina representing the Bureau, Palavin to make an impression, and—how about Lagodenko? Here you are, Pyotr—a Komsomol assignment! As soon as we make arrangements at the plant we'll let you know—probably within the next few days."

"I won't go if Palavin does," said Lagodenko abruptly.

"Why not?"

"I'm not sailing in the same boat with him."

"Starting all over again!"

"Well, I'm not, and that's all," repeated Lagodenko gloomily. "If you want him to make an impression, send him to the Glazunov Musical Comedy Studio."

"By the way, Palavin's busy just now," put in Valya Mauer. "He's writing skits for our New Year's party."

"Very well, then you four go without him," said Spartak.

The five members of the Bureau unanimously adopted a decision reading:

"Third-year Komsomol members of the Literature Department have resolved to establish friendly contact with, and offer their services to, the Komsomol organization of the machine-building plant where Comrade Kuznetsov is Komsomol Secretary. During the second term the activities resulting from this contact to be developed on as large a scale as possible."

Vadim and Spartak left the Institute together.

The sky, still light in the west, was banked with purple clouds. A brisk wind was driving them overhead, tearing them into dark ragged tufts. At one place the pavement was cut off by a high wooden fence, behind which a tall building was under construction. Although it was already evening, work was in full swing—welding torches were flashing and crackling, workmen were calling to each other on the scaffolding. Lights shone from the top storeys, something kept hammering, something else kept flapping like taut canvas, while a man's voice, thin and indistinct, came brokenly on the wind.

Spartak passed swiftly over the sagging plank walk. In one hand he carried a pile of books, in the other a string-bag. Vadim could hardly keep up with him.

"Building is going on here too, day and night," muttered Spartak without turning round. "We're used to

these fences—look on them as a nuisance. But there are youth brigades working behind them. Young people who have come from all over the country to help build Moscow. Right next door to us. . . .”

Vadim wanted to explain to Spartak why he was so eager to start working at the plant. But it was not easy to explain—it had some vague connection with Lena, and Vadim felt that Spartak didn’t take Lena seriously. He joked with her and was affectionately playful, but never serious. No, there was no point in talking to Spartak about Lena. And for some reason Spartak seemed different today. He was not the same Spartak with whom Vadim had climbed mountains and argued about Blok and Mayakovsky—not the stubborn, touchy youth with the thin, boyish neck who had always seemed less knowing and experienced than Vadim. Today Vadim saw in him a new person, one who showed insight and intelligence and commanded respect. Today he had spoken about something of the greatest importance to all of them, especially to Vadim.

“How are you getting on nowadays?” Spartak asked suddenly, still without turning round. “You and I haven’t had a good talk for a long time. How’s your mother?”

Vadim said his mother was very ill.

“So that’s why you’ve been so down in the mouth?” said Spartak. “I could see there was something wrong.”

Yes, that was the main thing that was wrong, but there were a few minor worries as well. They talked about the coming exams. Spartak mentioned Pichugina’s rebuke. He *was* behind in Logic, though he had managed to scrape through his exam.

“It’s not easy, Dima,” he said with a sigh. “I get so damned tired. Being married—you can’t neglect the wife. . . . And there are other obligations—right now, for instance, I’ve got to stop at the grocer’s and buy something for supper. Shura has to submit her graduation

design in a few days, so the household's on my shoulders. A family man! Can't be helped!"

His laugh showed that he was proud of being a family man, despite the difficulties.

"The worst of me is, I can't take things lightly. If I undertake a job, I go at it tooth and nail. That's what wears me out. A very bad habit. Oh, yes—" he whirled round, and took Vadim by the shoulder. "Be sure to have a look at their library!"

"What library?"

"At the plant. Don't forget to take a look when you go there. That's one thing we can certainly help them with. We must find new methods of working with them. Interesting, stimulating methods. Undertaking the job is one thing, carrying it out is another. How are we going to do it? That's the thing!"

They parted at the corner.

"Think it over. New methods! Think it over!" Spartak called after Vadim.

Chapter 11

After the last lecture on Saturday, Spartak Galustyan announced that third-year students were to hold a *Yoskresnik** the next day to help lay gas pipes on the outskirts of Moscow. They were to meet at the Institute at nine in the morning and march to the construction site. Lagodenko, Vadim, and Gortsev were appointed team leaders. "Lagodenko for his muscles, Gortsev for his reliability, and you, Vadim, for the combination of both," said Spartak jokingly.

Vadim arrived at the hostel at half past eight on Sunday morning. In accordance with instructions to come in work clothes, he was wearing his old army togs—top boots and a wadded camouflage jacket.

* A Sunday devoted to voluntary labour.—*Tr.*

Lagodenko and Vilkin were doing setting-up exercises in the yard. In spite of the cold, they had on nothing but shorts and undervests. The sun was not yet up, and in the blue light of dawn their arms looked swarthy and powerful. They were flexing the knees and bending from the waist.

Lagodenko shouted:

"Watch your breathing! Inhale! Exhale!"

When they all went into the building, the electric light revealed that poor Max was covered with goose flesh.

"Look at Max! You'll be the death of him! He looks more like a plucked chicken than our respected editor!"

"Oh, I feel fine!" cried Max, but his voice was unrecognizable and his teeth chattered.

"Do him good!" growled Lagodenko. "I'll make a world champion of that puny specimen yet!"

Max immediately got into his clothes, but Lagodenko remained in his undervest for some time, contracting his biceps and demonstrating them to Vadim from different angles. He held the towel with which he wiped his face as if it weighed a ton.

"Hey, fellows, shall I take my camera?" called Alexei.

"Yes, take it, but get a move on!" answered Vadim, glancing at his watch. "Are the girls ready?"

"They're quite ready."

Down the corridor came the noise of the awakening hostel: a slamming of doors, a clatter of dishes, a hum of voices, a shuffling of slippered feet.

Rashid alone remained under his blankets, glancing at his friends with sleepy black eyes. First-year students were not taking part in this *Voskresnik*. When the men were ready and leaving their rooms, Rashid suddenly sprang out of bed and cried:

"I'm coming too! Wait a minute! I'm coming too!"

"Catch up with us then!" replied Vadim. "We'll be at the Institute."

Outside, the men were joined by the girls, and all of them set out for the Institute. It was light now. A hazy sun had risen above the violet roofs of the houses, throwing splashes of copper light on the windows, the street lamps, and the windshields of automobiles. Distant buildings were wrapped in mist, making the street seem endless.

By nine o'clock the entire class—some hundred and fifty students—was gathered outside the Institute. Spartak had business at the District Komsomol Committee that day, so Levchuk was in charge. Sergei Palavin was absent too—he had said that he could not take part in the *Voskresnik* because he had to finish the paper he was to read at the S.R.S. the next day. His excuse had been accepted.

After a quarter of an hour's wait for latecomers, the students set out in a long column. The boys joked and pummelled each other, the girls sang. Every now and then Alexei would dash out of line to photograph some irresistible scene.

Vadim was eager to get to work, and secretly hoped that he and his team would distinguish themselves. He longed for physical labour—hard, exhausting labour that would make him sweat. He had been sitting too much over his books of late. And apparently his eagerness was shared by Lagodenko, Remeshkov, Sasha Levchuk, limping bravely up ahead, and by all his other friends marching in this long column, along these fresh, awakening streets. They were marching to work as if off for an outing, for a Sunday tramp through the countryside, and the sense of being one of this jolly crowd of people united by the simple, natural longing for work, filled each of them with joy and strength. Vadim knew that not all of the students had been anxious to take part in this

Voskresnik. Some of them had planned to spend the Sunday studying, others had arranged to go out with friends, still others were simply lazy and wanted to sleep. Yet they were all laughing and joking now, truly glad they had not succumbed to the tempter's voice whispering in their ears when they woke up: "What if I don't go? They can manage without me. After all, it's voluntary."

Lena was marching in the middle of the girls' column. For some reason Vadim found it particularly pleasant to see her in a plain wadded jacket, a shawl on her head, her hands encased in enormous leather mittens, probably her father's, which she kept laughingly exhibiting. Suddenly she ran up to him.

"They say you're our leader, Vadim," she said gaily.

"I am, and I intend to make you sweat!"

"Really? I've only just been told." She took his arm and gently but insistently led him off to one side. "It's a good thing for me that you're our leader."

"Why? Think I'll lower your quota?"

Lena shook her head seriously.

"Oh no! But last night I had a sore throat, and if I'm out very long today I may really get ill. How shall I sing then? Next week we're beginning rehearsals for the New Year's party, and anyway my vocal teacher told me that under no circumstances . . . I'm not even sure. . ."

As Vadim walked beside her, his head kept drooping lower and lower.

"Well?" he asked.

"It wouldn't look well for me to dig for half an hour and then go home, would it? I'd hate to do a thing like that. Wouldn't it be better if I just slipped away now, without anybody noticing it?"

He stopped abruptly and looked into her clear, smiling eyes with their golden lashes. Suddenly these lashes began to quiver and droop, hiding her eyes, and Lena blushed.

"Why don't you say something?" she asked in a tone of surprise which Vadim found false. "Here's my street. So I'll just run along. All right, Vadim?"

"All right," said Vadim.

"No one will see me."

"No one."

Lena dropped his arm and put up her face to whisper into his ear:

"Drop in to see me after the *Voskresnik*. You'll have to pass my house anyway. Oh dear, it seems I've caught an awful cold! Good-bye, Dima, you'll come, won't you?"

He nodded. Lena walked away, and presently Vadim heard Nina Fokina saying:

"Lena! Where are you going? We're marching straight ahead!"

And Lena answered:

"I've got a sore throat, girls! I asked Belov and Levchuk for permission to leave. I'm awfully worried about my throat!"

"Oh yes, take care of it, Lena, or you won't be able to sing for us on New Year's Eve!"

Vadim didn't look back. He suddenly felt as miserable and ashamed as if it were he who had done wrong. He slumped along, afraid to look round and meet the eyes of Nina Fokina, Raya, Galya Mamonova with her tiny, child-like hands, and all the boys who must now be whispering about what had happened. He seemed to feel their eyes staring at his back, and was sure they knew why he didn't turn round.

The building site was situated on one of those narrow, crooked streets, formerly typical of the outskirts of the city and by some miracle still untouched by the wave of construction. Forty years before, this district had been inhabited by the families of impoverished aristocrats,

small shopkeepers, and impecunious artisans. Under the Soviet regime big factories had sprung up there, the streets had been straightened or done away with, and new ones laid out. Moscow had expanded westward, and this new Moscow, with its tall houses, huge shops, its squares and parks, had been brought within a few minutes' journey of the centre of the town by the Metro and buses. This part of Moscow, while actually on the outskirts of the town, was much less like the old outskirts than were the narrow, crooked streets, considerably more central, which still lurked on the edges of some of the new sections. Moscow was spreading rapidly, overleaping its former boundaries, not only in the west, but in all directions, and this extraordinary removal of the distinction between "outlying" and "central" districts was to be observed everywhere.

The idea of what constituted a "better district" was changing from year to year. Fifteen years before, Arbat Street was considered one of the "better districts." In five years' time the Leningrad Highway section had become just as fine, and by another five years the Mozhaisk and Kaluzhskaya highways and Bolshaya Polyanka were rivalling them both. Little by little the whole of Moscow was becoming a "better district." The outskirts disappeared because, as a matter of fact, the centre disappeared. To be sure, the Kremlin and the Red Square still remained the geometric and symbolic centre of Moscow, but all the conveniences formerly associated with living in the centre—gas and telephones, convenient transport, the nearness of department stores, theatres and cinemas—all of these were now part of the twenty-five "better districts" of Moscow.

The street on which the *Voskresnik* took place was also doomed to extinction. A wide avenue was to take its place, the contours of which were indicated by the high

wooden fences screening blocks of houses under construction.

Before the new avenue could be paved, gas pipes had to be laid. The heavy black pipes were already lying at the bottom of a long trench which the students were to fill in. The foreman of the job, a lean, short-legged man in a leather coat and rubber boots, gave Levchuk and the team leaders lengthy, detailed, and very courteous instructions. He had a low, husky voice.

"Now mind you pack down the earth as soon as you've made a layer up to your ankles," he wheezed, shaking a tobacco-stained finger. "That's our rule, or else the ground'll settle. Come with me and get your spades."

When all the students had been supplied with spades, the foreman pointed out the sections allotted to the teams. Each student was expected to shovel approximately six cubic metres of the earth piled along both sides of the ditch.

"Let's see who'll finish first, Dima," said Lagodenko with an exaggerated wink.

He had thrown off his coat, and now appeared in a tight jersey tucked into his trousers; it showed his shoulders and biceps to advantage, and was on that account his favourite attire. Alexei was still hopping along the mounds of earth seeking advantageous positions from which to snap pictures.

"Get going there! Hey, you in the beret! Break away from the women—where do you think you are, on the beach? Get a spade in your hands!" he shouted angrily. "Attention! I'm going to photograph the beginning of the great labour effort! Ready—go! Hey, move aside there, you're hiding the team leader!"

Vadim walked down the length of his section, seeing that people didn't get in each other's way. An enormous yellow sun wrapped in white mist, like the yolk in a poached egg, had already risen high in the sky, flooding

houses and street and people with diffused wintry light. There was a light frost. Many of the students, not yet warmed up, began to work in their coats, but soon discarded them.

The foreman gave instructions to the girls:

"Comrades, you're not holding your spades right," he said, with an apologetic cough. "Grip them lower down, and stand sidewise, like this..."

He spat on his hands and took up a spade to demonstrate. At least five times he said to Vadim:

"Don't forget about packing down the earth, will you? That's right—as soon as you have a layer up to your ankles, pack it down!"

Work got under way all down the line. Spadefuls of earth flew into the ditch from both sides, falling one on top of the other, striking dully against the pipe. Vadim took off his jacket and spat on his hands before picking up his spade. He took pleasure in the feel of the resisting soil, in its fresh, cold smell, and in the strength of his arms, lifting the earth so easily and rhythmically, almost without effort. For a long time he worked without resting, his legs planted firmly apart. He liked the work. He wanted to keep at it until he was thoroughly exhausted. Gradually he ceased thinking about his movements, which became mechanical, and about his responsibilities as team leader. But he could not free himself from the unpleasant impression Lena's leaving had made on him.

All that talk about her throat and vocal teacher was just an excuse, he could see that clearly now. He should not have given her permission to go, or at least he should have sent her to Levchuk. Why hadn't he thought of that? Of course he should have sent her to Levchuk. Perhaps no one had attributed any importance to the fact that he had let her go home. Perhaps everyone believed she had a sore throat. And perhaps she really had. But the unpleas-

ant feeling that he tried in vain to argue away did not come from the fear that people would have a bad opinion of either of them. That did not matter.

The thing that mattered was that he himself had a bad opinion of her. For the first time. And it was very definite.

In order to drive these thoughts out of his mind, Vadim decided to think about his paper. And this reminded him of the fact that not once had he and Lena discussed his paper, though they had discussed everything else under the sun. Sometimes he had involuntarily mentioned it, for it was constantly on his mind, but he was immediately made to feel that she was not interested. Once she had said: "You're very conceited, Vadim. Why do you keep talking about that paper of yours all the time?" He had never mentioned it to her after that. He must drop in to see her after the *Voskresnik*—perhaps she really was ill. She might be, after all. But he couldn't go in this dirty jacket and boots, and with a dirty face. Besides, if he didn't go, he could keep thinking that perhaps she really was ill. No, he wouldn't go.

Absorbed in his thoughts, Vadim did not hear the joking and talking going on around him, or the incessant laughter and gay banter of the girls. From somewhere came Alexei's guffaw:

"It's a gas pipe we're burying, Max, not your sweetheart! And it's earth and not gold dust—don't be afraid to spill it."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look at the editor, friends! That's a sight for you!"

Rashid was working not far from Vadim. Slowly he would straighten up and give his spade a jerk to make the earth fall off, while he kept up a steady stream of conversation with Galya:

"My grandfather dug ditches. Every Uzbek digs ditches. When I was seven years old I took up a *ketmen*

—have you ever seen a *ketmen*? No? It's not like a spade. It's made of steel. Has to be forged. You lift it over your head, very high, and then sling it down. It's heavy, cuts into the earth of its own weight."

"It must be hard to handle, isn't it?" asked Galya.

"Yes, it's hard. But you get used to it. We dug the canal. In the summer. Do you know what our summers are like? Especially in the steppe. We dug for one hour, rested for five minutes, and so on for the whole day. During the rests we threw ourselves down on the ground and lay there, just resting, our caps over our eyes. Then a *suochi* would come up—that's a waterboy. His pail would be covered with cheesecloth, but even so the water would be dirty—yellow and warm, like tea. It left sand on your teeth when you drank it, and you'd spit."

"How awful!"

"Why awful? We had a good time. We lived in tents. We'd go walking in the evenings and sing songs. The steppe is very big. And full of those—we call them *urgumchaks*—big hairy yellow spiders. They jump like rabbits. Ah yes, phalanges! Do you know what they are?"

"Phalanges? Ugh, I've heard about them," said Galya. "We studied them in zoology."

"That's it. The smell of our kitchen drew them from all over the steppe. Whenever we saw one, we'd chase it and kill it. Well, at last we finished the canal and released the water. At first it came little by little, ever so slowly, and we walked alongside of it, just as slowly, and we sang and shouted anything that came into our heads. And there was one girl—a merry little thing, and so pretty—she jumped down and ran up ahead of the water and danced. How she danced! . . . Like Tamara Khanum—even better!"

Meanwhile, the ditch was being filled in. The pipe was already covered, and Vadim told two of the boys to take

a beetle and pack down the first layer. From the next section came Lagodenko's deep voice arguing vehemently about something.

Apparently he was bent on having his team finish first. Vadim realized this was prompted not only by his usual eagerness to be first in everything, but also by his desire to rehabilitate himself after the Komsomol reprimand. On a sheet of plywood nailed to the door of a two-storeyed house appeared the first announcements of how the work was progressing. From where he stood, Vadim read the large letters printed by Max:

"Results of first two hours first layer already packed down by Belov's team Gortsev's team lagging

"Speed up, comrades! All work to be finished by four o'clock!"

Vadim divided up his team into groups of ten. The fastest groups were Andrei's and Rashid's, though they were made up mostly of girls. An hour later a rest period was called. Vadim himself felt tired, but strangely enough, the wearier he felt, the easier and more willingly he worked. No one mentioned Lena to him, and he himself stopped thinking about her. His back began to ache. He felt hot and thirsty.

Vadim's team finished first—at three o'clock.

"You can go home," said Levchuk.

"Shall we?" said Vadim to the students standing about him.

"We ought to help Gortsev," said Andrei.

"Let's!" nodded Alexei.

"Of course!" chimed in Marina. "We can't leave them here!"

Part of Vadim's team walked over to Gortsev's section—there was not room for all of them. Lagodenko's team was just finishing. Alexei took the sailor's picture,

but first he snapped Vadim and Levchuk, holding spades, their arms about each other's shoulders. Levchuk was smaller than Vadim, and he had difficulty keeping his balance on the soft earth, so the embrace was a clumsy one.

Alexei said the pose was banal, and they ought to find something striking, something with a message, but nobody could think of anything, and they were photographed just as they were.

Vadim asked the foreman if there wasn't some job the rest of his team could do.

"Give the earth another good pack-down," he said, adding apologetically: "Those are the orders—to pack it down as hard as you can."

Vadim sent four of the boys to do this.

"Can't you think of something else for the rest of us? Some little job taking half an hour?"

"Half an hour? Well, let's see, let's see..."

Removing his peaked cap, he scratched the back of his head and glanced about him.

"Of course there's work to be done," he said at last, with a sigh meant to be encouraging. "We'll find it—just a moment! Hm! See that heap of earth over there? And just behind it that post with the two supports? You might drag it over to the fence."

There was indeed a "post with two supports" lying where he indicated—a huge iron post with iron rails screwed down its length. Ten boys dragged it over to the fence.

It was now past four, and twilight had set in. Vadim was still thirsty. He pulled on his jacket and went up the street to a soft drink stand.

When he reached the top he looked back. It no longer resembled the street they had entered that morning. The trench with the dirt piled on either side, disfiguring the street like a deep scar, had disappeared. Lagodenko's

and Gortsev's teams had finished their work. Students were putting on their coats, walking over to the workshed with spades over their shoulders, dispersing in noisy groups. The street seemed suddenly crowded with people. Vadim could not make out the faces of his friends in the twilight, but he recognized the voices of Alexei and Lagodenko, Marina's laughter, the soft, languorous voice of Galya Mamonova: "Somebody lend me a mirror! I'm a sight, aren't I?" There were innumerable voices, all tangled and interwoven, drowning each other out. Someone called: "Where's Belov? Belo-o-o-v!" and a girl's voice answered: "He's gone for a drink."

"Spade missing?" boomed Lagodenko. "I turned them all in, I tell you! I have about as much use for your spades as a priest for a mouth organ!"

"Who wants to go to the movies with me?"

"Well, we finished first, didn't we?"

"Of course—you had the most men on your team."

"Look, fellows, Alexei hung his coat up on the fence, and now he can't reach it! We dug the earth away!"

Vadim felt that he was not in Moscow, but in some young, new, unfamiliar town. The working day was over, and he and his friends were going home, or to the movies, or to the library. A happy work day was over. Happy indeed! Had it not been true happiness for him and his friends to come out voluntarily to that construction site and work conscientiously, until they were dripping with sweat on that cold December day? Had they not experienced the supreme happiness of fellowship, the happiness of being bound together in a common task, in united effort?

"Belo-o-o-v! Di-i-i-i-m-a!" came the angry voice of Lagodenko.

"Coming!" cried Vadim, suddenly returning to the world about him.

He ran over to the stand. There were no soft drinks, so he drank a mug of beer. The woman who poured it out was wearing a white duck coat on top of a fur one.

"Are you one of those laying the gas pipe?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"I just wondered when the gas would be turned on. I live in that house over there."

"You'll get it soon."

"It was promised for the New Year. Do you think you'll finish by then?"

"I think we will," said Vadim gravely. "We must."

"So we'll be baking New Year cakes in the gas range!" she laughed, gazing at Vadim with shining eyes. When he had gulped down a second mug and placed it on the counter, the woman in the white coat said pensively: "That's a fine job you've done—and a very necessary one."

Chapter 12

More than the usual number of people attended the last meeting of the S.R.S. before the winter exams. The news of Sergei's report had spread all over the Institute, and students from the History Department and even the Biology Department came to hear it. At the long table next to the speaker's desk sat Nina Arkadyevna Bespyatova, who lectured on Western Literature, Professor Krechetov, and Professor Kozelsky, his pipe between his teeth, his pink complexion glowing. He made no notes, simply sat there squinting fixedly at Sergei through clouds of pipe smoke.

Sergei read his report in a loud, distinct voice. Whenever he read a sentence which he felt to be particularly well turned or important, he would stop and glance at his professors, as if to say: "How's that?"

The paper was interesting, and everyone listened attentively, though the reading of it took more than an hour. The two senior students who were Sergei's critics, agreed that he had done important and thorough research. Bespyatova and Kozelsky made a few minor criticisms, but, on the whole, Palavin was praised and congratulated for his achievement, for his truly creative and scientific effort. Kozelsky said that Palavin's paper was too mature to be considered student work. In a word, Sergei enjoyed a triumph.

Lagodenko whispered into Vadim's ear:

"It's a good paper—no denying it. I never expected it of that Palaverer of yours."

Sergei was surrounded by students after the meeting. Fyodor Kaplin kept pumping his hand and repeating:

"I knew it! Remember what I said about Palavin? Right from the start I said...."

Kamkova drawled in a nasal voice:

"Splendid! Splendid work! Your definition of the three distinctive characteristics of the drama was truly remarkable. A very subtle analysis. Thank you. Thank you immensely."

Sergei displayed exaggerated diffidence. He merely nodded and smiled. Vadim rejoiced in his success.

"And you kept wailing that you hadn't enough time, that you couldn't get going. And look what a sensation you made!"

"If you knew how I worked, Dima, how I slaved! Can you imagine—?" Alone with Vadim, he could not restrain his joy. He spoke quickly and impetuously: "I didn't sleep for six days and smoked like a chimney—two packs a day. I'm worn out."

"Well, it was worth it."

"That's true. You know me—I just had to be included in that first issue!" He laughed and gave a deprecating

ing wave of his hand. "And the preparatory work I did! Went through the archives of the Museum of Literature and the Bakhrushin Museum and got in touch with the University. One of the postgraduates there helped me immensely—he's writing a dissertation on Turgenev. I wanted like hell to make this a piece of real research. Did you notice the smile on Krechetov's face while I was reading? I glanced at him twice, and he smiled both times."

"I could see he was pleased," said Vadim.

"Oh, yes. Listen, did it look all right for me to shake hands with the professors before I began? Really? You're sure it didn't seem too forward, too familiar? No? Well, all right. . . . On the whole, of course, I'm pleased."

"I should think so!"

"And you'll get into the second issue of the journal. What difference does it make? First, second—it's all the same. The important thing is to do a decent job, isn't it? You work slowly and thoroughly, like building a house. Don't I know! I remember how you used to fill two whole notebooks whenever you wrote a school composition! The rest of us would turn in four pages and think we were overworked."

"It isn't the length that counts."

"Naturally. I understand that, but I envy you just the same. You're always so thorough and solid while with me it's always a flare, a flight, a burst of inspiration, or whatever you call it. Suddenly I get an idea and off I go, like jumping off a springboard. Then I have to go over everything a dozen times."

Vadim felt that Sergei considered his "springboard" method a mark of talent, and was proud of it. But he only smiled to himself, willing to forgive Sergei anything today.

"Sometimes your method makes itself felt," he couldn't resist saying good-naturedly. "When you run out of

material, you fill in the spaces with high-sounding phrases—you know—froth.”

“Froth?” repeated Sergei in surprise. “Where? Can you remember any such places?”

“Where you talk about Turgenev’s outlook and Stankevich’s circle,* for example. I felt you treated this too superficially.”

“Really? I hadn’t thought of it. Perhaps.” Sergei yawned, covered his eyes with his hands and pressed his thumbs into his temples. “My head’s like lead. I’m worn out.... Boris Matveyevich didn’t feel that way. Neither did Krechetov. Nobody, in fact, but you.” Suddenly he glanced back. “Boris Matveyevich,” said Sergei, “I am being criticized for not sufficiently elaborating on Turgenev’s world outlook and not saying enough about Stankevich’s circle.”

Vadim hadn’t noticed Kozelsky approach.

The professor took his pipe out of his mouth, fixed Vadim with a fierce eye, and said:

“Weren’t you at the meeting, Belov?”

“Yes, I was, Boris Matveyevich.”

“Then why didn’t you speak up there? I don’t consider it very courageous to find fault when no one can hear you. That’s hardly your style, is it?”

“But on the whole I liked Sergei’s paper.”

“I’m sure you did. But of late you’ve been devoting yourself to destructive criticism, my friend, forgetting that your main task is to create, and not to destroy. When shall we see your paper?”

“I’m still working on it.”

“Still working on it? For six months? What is it to be, a monograph in three volumes? Ivan Antonovich keeps

* N. V. Stankevich (1813-1840)—an impassioned supporter of general education and an opponent of serfdom. He headed a literary and philosophical circle in the 'thirties to which all the most public-minded people of the time belonged.—*Tr.*

asking us to put off the first issue until Belov has his paper ready. How long are we to wait?" Kozelsky asked Vadim.

"Why should you wait for me? I haven't asked you to."

"You haven't asked us to? You are expected to work, to study, to take lecture notes, and not to make eloquent speeches at meetings, particularly when you have no proof of what you say! Why are you smiling?"

"I've never seen you like this before, Professor."

"Haven't you? You said my lectures were empty and non-Marxist. Be so good as to prove your words." Kozelsky had grown red to the roots of his hair. "I know everything you said at that meeting!"

Vadim had not said Kozelsky's lectures were non-Marxist, but that made no difference now. He felt that Kozelsky was unthreatening him, and expected him to deny what he had said at the meeting. But instead, Vadim, suddenly angered, asked with grim determination:

"Do you think a lecture lacking in ideological message can be called Marxist?"

"He didn't say that, Boris Matveyevich," put in Sergei. "He only said..."

"Yes, I did!" interrupted Vadim, irritated by Sergei's effort to defend him. "And I have no intention of denying it!"

"Oh, you haven't? Allow me to remind you, young man, that you are little better than a schoolboy as yet."

"Perhaps. But would you like me to prove my words here in this hall?"

"Am I to argue with you? Hold a debate? A controversy in the papers?" Kozelsky gave a nervous laugh, but instantly knitted his brows and said in the deep, reproachful tones of teacher to pupil: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Your conduct is disgraceful."

Other people drifted toward them: Kamkova, Fyodor Kaplin, and that inquisitive little Voronkova.

"What's the trouble, Boris Matveyevich?" asked Kamkova, glancing sternly at Vadim.

"Nothing of any importance," said Kozelsky, turning to leave. "A literary tiff of purely local significance."

"So that's what you think!" cried Vadim belligerently.

Sergei tugged his elbow.

"Drop it! Sh!" he whispered. "What do you expect of the old man?"

"What's up? What's happened?" asked Voronkova, her mouth wide-opened with curiosity.

"Oh, nothing. . . ."

"You've quarrelled with Kozelsky, haven't you? Why? Did he ask for your theses, or what?"

No one answered her. Carefully tying up the folder containing his manuscript, Sergei silently took leave of Vadim and went out of the room.

Vadim was upset by this talk with Kozelsky. He had no desire to find himself in Lagodenko's shoes. Vadim realized that his conflict with Kozelsky—a conflict just begun—was much more serious and significant than Lagodenko's. Most unpleasant of all was the realization that he had behaved unworthily—he had lost control of himself and made himself ridiculous. Crying out like that: "So that's what you think!" How childish! He should have answered with calm dignity, saying to the professor's face just what he had said at the meeting. Repeating everything, word for word, and nothing else. But he was always like that—knowing how he should act five minutes too late.

A few days after this incident, Vadim was summoned before the Party Bureau of the Literature Department. He found Levchuk there when he entered. The Secretary of the Bureau—Professor Krylov, an energetic young man with fair hair and bright eyes who looked more like an engineer than a professor—shook his hand warmly. Krylov knew Vadim well, and Vadim knew him even better,

for he had been attending his lectures on Political Economy for a whole term.

Krylov asked Vadim what he thought of the work of the S.R.S. Did he find defects, and if so, what were they?

"Of course there are defects. We are working without a plan, Fyodor Andreyevich. Papers are written on any subject that comes along, and very little is being done in the field of Soviet literature. I had expected the work to be much more interesting."

"I see."

"Our discussions are much too academic, too formal."

"Too peaceful?" asked Krylov with a smile. "Too few arguments and clashes of opinion? That's wrong, of course. Young folks ought to make some noise and test their strength."

"Oh, we do have hot arguments, Fyodor Andreyevich, but only after the meetings."

"How do you explain that?"

"To a great extent I explain it by the fact that Kozelsky is not the man to head the society. Why shouldn't someone else take his place. Krechetov, for instance?"

"Unfortunately, Ivan Antonovich's health doesn't permit him to assume such a responsibility." Krylov fell silent, frowning thoughtfully and tapping the table with his fingers. "As for Kozelsky—in February we are holding a meeting of the Council of Studies at which we shall discuss his work very seriously. Won't you speak there on behalf of the third-year students, Belov? I think you threatened to at the meeting."

"Yes, I think I shall," said Vadim after a moment's consideration.

"Only not in the manner of Lagodenko," put in Levchuk. "What you say must be serious and well founded on fact. As you said then: 'with notes from his lectures in your hand.'"

... When Vadim went out into the hall he saw Kozelsky through the window. The professor was hurrying across the court, looking even more erect than usual in the conical astrakhan hat. Beside him strode Sergei, his hands clasped behind his back.

"He loves that sort of thing," said Raya Volkova who had stopped at the window next to Vadim.

"What sort of thing?"

"To stroll along with his professorial colleagues and discuss the future of literature. He does, doesn't he?"

"No," said Vadim curtly. "That's just one side of him. You heard his paper, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. Was it good?"

"Very good. Kozelsky said it could even go into our journal."

The day on which the students received their stipends was no ordinary day. The halls were noisier than usual, and had a holiday air. Alexei ran about, notebook in hand, paying his debts. The booklovers, with Fyodor Kaplin at their head, hotly discussed whether to do the rounds of the secondhand bookshops now or after dinner. By four o'clock the lunch counter had run out of cakes and "Kazbek" cigarettes.

That evening Vadim was to meet Lena. The day after the *Voskresnik*, she had come to the Institute, but they had had no chance to speak to each other and then Vadim had to go to the S.R.S. meeting. They had previously arranged to go to the movies on Tuesday, and so now Vadim was waiting for her at the entrance to the Arbat Metro Station.

This seemed to be the favourite meeting place for the whole Arbat district. In the round vestibule languished the silent martyrs of the trysting place, oblivious of one another. Some were pacing up and down impatiently, others stood on the steps or around the telephone booths.

Among them could be seen a tall, bronzed, imperturbable naval officer with a dead pipe between his teeth; a girl whose grief was all too apparent: *he* was ten minutes late; a ruddy-faced fellow with a box of sweets under his arm, who kept smiling and winking to himself; a black-bearded man in a green slouch hat and crepe-soled shoes sweeping back and forth like a tiger, knocking into people without apologizing; and a great many more—youths, and girls, and handsome women, their faces expressing indifference, boredom, bashfulness, alarm, joy, or complacency.

At regular intervals the glowing crater of this subterranean station erupted a lava of passengers. Dense and seething, it swept through its marble confines into the bright and spacious vestibule and thence through the glass doors into the street, where it thinned, dissolving in the crowd, and in the blue air of the evening. People fished each other out of this crowd with happy exclamations and a pressing of hands, and then disappeared as though borne away by a gust of wind.

"Here I am!"

Vadim turned round to see a smiling Lena, looking very smart in her fur-trimmed coat and white fur cap.

"Didn't you recognize me?" she asked, laughing.

"You've got something new on your head."

"I just had it made. Like it?"

The cinema on the square was showing *The Third Blow*. Both of them had seen it, so they decided to go to the Metropole Theatre where they could take their choice of several films. They walked down the quiet Kalinin Street, its pavements white with snow, its roadway a black ribbon of asphalt. The quietness made them want to walk slowly and talk softly. Lena talked about her vocal lessons and how she had sung at a House of Culture a few days ago, and what a cordial reception she had met with and

how difficult it was to keep up with her singing now, with the examinations coming.

Vadim listened to her in silence. He had planned to have a serious talk with her tonight. There were many things which needed clearing up, if only to himself. He had difficulty in beginning. Suddenly he asked:

"How's your throat? All right?"

"My throat? Oh, yes—it's all right now. I'm awfully healthy, you know."

"You get over things quickly, don't you?"

"Very quickly. Do you know when I feel ill? When it suits me. I'm never ill if I don't want to be."

She said this proudly.

"Lena," said Vadim, "why did you go to the Pedagogical Institute and not to the Conservatory?"

"How could I go to the Conservatory when I had no particular talent? It takes time for that to develop. And besides—do you think it's easy to get into the Conservatory? And I never wanted to, particularly. I'm not studying singing for a profession."

"What for then?"

"Because..." Lena paused a second before she said, in the didactic tone she was fond of adopting: "A woman must be able to do everything, Vadim. She must be able to sing, and to dress, and to be pretty. Can't you understand?"

"Perhaps. In other words, you're preparing yourself to become a woman, is that it?"

Lena gave him a look of silent rebuke and said:

"That tone doesn't suit you at all, Vadim. Don't try to be like that cynical Pyotr."

Vadim felt that the conversation was taking the wrong turn, and that Lena was guiding it, though he was asking the questions and she was only answering them. The questions were not the right ones, not the ones he had intended to ask. He was saying vague, superfluous things.

But how very difficult it was to utter the simple question: "Lena, what is your aim in life?" Difficult and useless. It would be absurd to put such a question. Could any words she spoke disperse the doubts torturing him?

Suddenly and involuntarily the words came out:

"What is your aim, Lena?"

"What aim, Dima?" she asked in gentle surprise.

"The aim of your life."

"For heaven's sake!" she exclaimed, bursting out laughing. "What is this, an inquisition? Or a guessing game? Did you ever hear anything so high-flown as: 'The aim of your life!?' I thought we got over such things at school. What's on your mind, Dima?"

She looked at him in wonderment, while he frowned and said nothing, greatly embarrassed.

"You're right, of course," he mumbled at last. "It's silly to talk about such things."

"It is, Dima!" said Lena quickly. "It's too naive for words. Do you think I could put all my plans and hopes for the future in two words? I don't give them much thought anyway. Why should I? I've just begun to live! Dima! Look out! We almost got run over!"

They stopped in the middle of the street, between two streams of cars. From the radio of a chocolate-coloured "ZIS" car came the strains of a musical-comedy duet: "All things pass, every laddie finds his lass..." Presently the traffic lights changed, enabling Vadim and Lena to reach the pavement.

"In the old days, students were always arguing about something," continued Lena. "About their aim in life, about the highest good, about God and the people and all sorts of things. But why should we waste our breath on such empty talk? I'm a Komsomol member, just like you; we have the same outlook, so what's there for us to argue about?"

"I have no intention of arguing," said Vadim after a short pause. "I'm not used to talking about such things and don't like to. But don't you see—sometimes—I feel—" He sighed, oppressed by the knowledge that he was floundering, and vaguely irritated with Lena, who should have seen and understood how hard he was struggling, and in what cause. But she did not see, or at any rate did not understand. Stubbornly, desperately, he kept up the unequal struggle. "What I wanted to say, Lena, was that there are certain things that we seem to understand perfectly, until there comes a moment when we suddenly discover we have never really understood, at least, not deep down in our hearts. When I was at the front, for instance. . . ."

"For goodness' sake, don't let us have any war stories!" exclaimed Lena, making a wry face.

"But I must," insisted Vadim. "I've got to have my say. At the front I came to have a new and deeper understanding of many simple things. My comrades and I would often talk about how we intended living in the future, about our work and our vocations, our dreams and aspirations. We even spoke about our aim in life. . . . And our words were very natural and sincere, I can assure you. They helped us, and gave us strength. And now—why should these words seem so naive and high-flown?"

"Because there was a war on then. That changes things," explained Lena, who was now listening attentively. "But what are you trying to get out of me?"

"I'm not trying to get anything out of you. I was just wondering what you wanted out of life?"

"Why this sudden interest?"

"I've got to know!" the words broke from him almost rudely.

Lena shrugged her shoulders. She was at a loss what to say.

"I don't know. . . . What do I want out of life? I want to live honestly, peacefully, and—well, happily." After a moment's pause she added hesitantly: "I want to work. . . ."

"Happily? In the sense that you want to be happily married?"

"Every woman wants to be happily married," retorted Lena, instantly becoming superior. "You're terribly boring and not at all original tonight, Vadim. You're even a bit vulgar, if you'll forgive my saying so. Do you insist on quarrelling?"

"No," said Vadim, shaking his head. "I don't!"

He suddenly felt desolate, almost mournful, not because he realized that nothing had come of his talk with Lena, but because the failure of this talk was the answer to his doubts. Nothing had come of something much bigger than the talk, and this was a bitter realization.

The usual noisy crowd swarmed in front of the "Metropole." The huge flat countenances of movie stars, who seemed to be exhausted by the glare of blue, crimson and yellow lights, gazed down at them from the electric signs.

There were no tickets to be had. Rather upset by this, Vadim went back to Lena, who was waiting for him outside, on the fringe of the crowd.

"See?" she gloated. "You can make fine discourses on philosophical subjects, but you can't even buy a ticket to the movies! What was our aim tonight? To go to the movies. And we couldn't even do that!"

"Not a single ticket, damn it all! It's the limit!" muttered Vadim, truly disappointed. He wanted to go to the movies more than ever now.

"Never mind, Dima. We'll just go for a walk. By the way, while I was waiting for you here a young man offered me a ticket. I didn't know how to get rid of him! Look how easily I could have achieved my aim without the slightest philosophy!" Lena laughed, very much

pleased. "It's a good thing you arrived on the scene, he slunk away at once. Here, give me your arm."

They went up Gorky Street where groups and couples were strolling as if along a boulevard. Everyone they passed, men and women alike, stared at Lena, though no one seemed to notice Vadim. Lena felt she was attracting attention, and consciously slowed her steps, gazing proudly in front of her.

"Don't smoke, Vadim; please don't," she begged when he took out a cigarette.

"Are you concerned about my health?"

"No, but you're smoking some foul brand tonight. It smells atrocious. Is it really such fun to smoke?" she added coquettishly.

They dropped into the little Newsreel Cinema and bought tickets. There were many people in the foyer waiting about and eating ice cream cones. Somebody called Vadim.

They turned to see Spartak making his way toward them, his wife in tow. In one hand he held a bag of tangerines.

"Lena too? Marvellous!" he exclaimed happily. "We're holding a little celebration—my wife demonstrated her graduation design today. What was it the professor told you, Shura?"

His slender, dark-eyed wife smiled self-consciously.

"Oh, for goodness' sake! . . ."

"Don't think she's so modest! You should have heard this shrinking little violet boasting a few minutes ago!" joked Spartak. "The professor said she had a fine analytical mind! Imagine being married to a fine analytical mind! Gives you the creeps, doesn't it? Steam turbines and such things. You'd never think it to look at her, would you?"

"Stop your nonsense," said Shura sternly, red with embarrassment. "You're a disgrace."

"Hear that? She's always squelching me," laughed Spartak, winking at Vadim. "Ah, me! Here girls, have a tangerine while Vadim and I go for a smoke."

In the smoking room he changed his tone, becoming very matter of fact. He said that the Komsomol organization at the plant had phoned that afternoon and wanted them to come the next day at three. They would have to leave immediately after lectures.

"Go through the plant to get an idea of the work, but don't forget—you're not on an excursion. Talk things over with Kuznetsov. Don't promise too much, but don't be afraid to tackle the job in earnest. I'm counting on you! If we undertake this thing, we must see it through."

Suddenly he asked:

"Do you like her?"

"Who?"

"Lena."

Vadim nodded and concentrated all his attention on blowing at the end of his cigarette.

"She's nice," said Spartak after some consideration. "Pretty."

Vadim and Lena had seats at the back. Spartak sat in front—he was nearsighted. When Lena took off her cap her ash-blond hair came rippling about her shoulders, and Vadim was conscious of the delicate scent she used. Seats creaked, people stumbled and shuffled about in the brief moment of darkness before the picture began.

"She explained her turbine to me," said Lena.

"Was it interesting?"

"As if I understood anything!" Lena yawned, covering her mouth with her hand. "Doesn't she have fun—going to the Newsreel Cinema with her husband and carrying on an animated discussion about steam turbines and trade union dues—with frozen tangerines as a treat!"

With a flash of its steel breast, a locomotive seemed to come charging straight into the audience, drawing after it truck after truck loaded with snowy logs. Now the scene shifted to a lumber camp where pines were being felled. A swarthy, broad-faced girl placed an electric saw against the trunk of one of the trees. Slowly the pine began to sway, then came crashing down in a cloud of snow. The girl smiled bashfully into the camera.

Presently this broad-faced sunburnt girl, now in a peaked cap, orange blouse, and brightly-patterned trousers, was seen riding full speed down a sunlit, dusty road. Heading for a flock of sheep, she rose in her stirrups and shouted, her white teeth flashing. Above the steppe was a white-hot sky filled with molten clouds.

What a wind there must be! And the smell of grass, and sheep and earth. . . . And those distant mountains with the sun lurking behind them—how near they look!

"What do they live on, do you know?" whispered Lena.

"No, I don't," replied Vadim without grasping what she meant.

"On nothing but their stipends? Oh, they couldn't!"

After the show, Vadim told Lena that he and the other boys were going to the plant the next day

"Perhaps you'll come along?"

"Perhaps. What'll we do there?"

He explained.

"Oh, I've often been to plants. My father's head of one. But . . . no, I can't make it tomorrow. I have something on."

"If you can't go tomorrow, let's make it another day," said Vadim impulsively. "I'll speak to Galustyan—shall I?"

"Wait a minute." Lena waved her hand and came to a halt, frowning and biting her lips. "What is it I have on tomorrow? Oh yes, tomorrow one of my school chums is

giving a birthday party, and I'm invited. And so are you, Vadim!" she added joyously. "I told her about you and she sent you an invitation. I told her I'd bring you. And I almost forgot!"

"But I can't go tomorrow, Lena!"

"Why not?" she asked in surprise. "I promised her you would. Everyone's expecting you! Why can't you come? You can go to the plant any day, but birthdays only come once a year. Do come, Dima!" She took him gently by the arm. "What'll I do there without you? You will, won't you?"

He looked into her large, pleading eyes, and for a second he wavered. It was hard to hurt her.

"But I've given my word, Lena," he said falteringly. "Can't you understand?"

"Well, I won't beg you. If you don't want to come, you don't have to."

The hand resting so lightly on his leather glove stiffened and pushed him away.

"Just as you like. Only don't make yourself out such an enthusiast. And you needn't see me home."

"Nonsense! Of course I'll see you home."

"No," she insisted, raising her head haughtily. "I've had enough for one day. Run along."

And she went swiftly down the street, tall and erect, the skirts of her coat flapping.

Chapter 13

At the Institute preparations for the New Year's party were in full swing. Every day after lectures a rehearsal was held in the small hall of the club. Whenever Vadim passed the door he heard someone pounding on the piano, girls singing, feet scraping and tapping in time to the music, and Sergei's peremptory metallic voice bringing sudden silence.

"Stop! I told you to keep together and not to make so much noise. Begin all over again!"

Once more the piano started and the girls began singing, all out of tune, until they were interrupted by shouts and laughter and a fist pounding the table.

"Quiet, comrades! It's time to get down to serious work!"

They reached the plant late in the afternoon, having been delayed first by Nina Fokina, who had a late lecture, and then by Lagodenko, who had decided to press his trousers at the last minute. "How can I go visiting without a crease?" he had said.

On the way, Vadim said to Lagodenko:

"How are things with you and Kozelsky?"

"What? Oh, that! I managed to scrape through."

"D'you mean to say he passed you?"

"Not he! Ivan Antonovich. I've had enough of Kozelsky."

"And what about Sevastopol?"

"What?" asked Lagodenko in some surprise, then, suddenly remembering, he frowned. "Oh, I don't know.... Perhaps I'll go."

"You're an ass!" said Vadim, but he could not help laughing. "And one of the stubbornest! Can't you admit being in the wrong for once?"

"I know," agreed Lagodenko lightly. "It's my nature—you were brought up at home, Dima. I grew up in the streets."

The plant was on the other side of town. They had to go by trolley bus and Metro. As they were getting on the bus, Sergei came running up. He pushed through the queue and jumped on the bus after it had started, grabbing at Vadim for support.

"You're not leaving without me! Push ahead there!" he cried, giving Vadim a friendly dig in the ribs.

When they were inside the bus he exclaimed eagerly:

"It's very important for me to see this plant. A good thing I met Spartak—he told me you'd just left."

During the last few days Sergei had been loud in his praises of the Bureau for its decision to make contacts with the plant, and had been looking forward to the first visit. He had talked Spartak into making him one of the delegates.

During the bus ride he was as loud and unrestrained as if he were in his own home. He joked and quoted choice bits from the skits he had written, instantly putting his finger to his lips and saying: "But I mustn't tell!" His gaiety infected even the passengers. Lagodenko alone grew morose and said not a word all the way.

"The Admiral's in the sulks, eh?" whispered Sergei to Vadim. "I always affect him like that, poor chap!"

"Listen everybody!" said Nina Fokina as they came out of the Metro. "It was all right for us to fool in the bus, but when we get to the factory we've got to be dignified. We mustn't forget. . ."

"We're delegates," finished Sergei. "The embodiment, so to speak—or shall I say, the vanguard. . ."

"Sergei! I'm serious!"

"Don't be afraid, Nina dear. Am I not with you? Lean upon me as upon a rock. I will speak of nothing but production problems."

"Drop it, Sergei," said Vadim with a frown. "You're so. . ."

"What's wrong with you?" said Sergei suddenly, with an impatient gesture. "Don't try to teach me. I know the plant and the workers better than any of you. I've seen a thing or two in my day."

The Komsomol Committee had its headquarters on the third floor of a large brick building set far back in the yard. Nearby was a garage, and there were several cars

standing about. A mechanic was working under one of them and another was squatting beside him. On seeing Andrei Sirikh, this man stood up and waved a wrench.

Andrei nodded back. When they had gone a few more steps he said to Vadim with an excited laugh:

"They haven't forgotten me! That was Zhenya Koshelev, one of the garage men. He plays the accordion."

They were met by Kuznetsov, Secretary of the Committee, a tall, heavy-set youth with close-cropped hair. He smiled and shook hands in an easy manner, winking goodnaturedly at Andrei. Beside him stood a dark youth with grave black eyes. Vadim noticed that he had a pair of calipers sticking out of his shirt pocket and that he wore his large watch outside his cuff.

"Gleb Shinkarev," he said, introducing himself in a firm deep voice.

"A member of our committee. Production section," explained Kuznetsov. "And our star grinder; there was an article about him in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* recently."

"A few days ago? I read it," said Sergei. "I've forgotten what it was called but I remember reading it."

"This is a busy time for us. Did you notice our sign?" asked Kuznetsov, pointing out of the window to a streamer on the building opposite, reading: "Workers, engineers, and technicians! It's a matter of honour to fulfil the year's plan by December 20!"

"And today's the 18th. Our Chief Engineer hasn't left the plant for twenty-four hours... I myself have to..."

The telephone rang. Picking up the receiver, Kuznetsov covered it with his hand for a moment, to say:

"Sit down, comrades. We'll go through the shops in a minute." He pressed the receiver against his ear with his shoulder. "Hullo. Who? ... Yes, Kuznetsov. ... What lists? ... I gave them to you at the beginning of the

month. . . . Yes. . . . Altogether there are a hundred and twenty boys studying in our evening school. Yes. . . . All right, I'll send them over tomorrow."

"Show us your Komsomol newspaper," said Andrei when Kuznetsov had hung up.

"We've been posting it in the shops lately. But let's take a look at the plant first. You'll enjoy it."

Again the phone rang.

"Kuznetsov speaking. . . . Hullo, Pyotr Savelyevich. . . . No, he didn't say anything. . . . How many men do you need? Will two be enough? . . . All right, we'll discuss it at the Party Bureau tonight. . . . No, I can't at present. . . . We'll talk about it tonight. Good-bye." He put down the receiver. "Come along, comrades."

Taking his cap off the rack, he hastily began pulling on his leather coat, as if afraid the telephone would ring again. And it did ring just as he was locking the door behind them.

"Damn it all!" he cried in vexation. "Well, go ahead. I'll catch up with you."

"You can see he's new at the game," said Sergei in lowered tones. "Never misses a phone call!"

"He's been Secretary for over a year," said Andrei. "I remember his coming to the plant from a trade school. He worked as fitter in the tool shop." Andrei gave a short laugh. "He grew up here. He was only up to my shoulder when he arrived, and now I'm only up to his."

Vadim was impressed by the plant. It seemed to him that all these buildings, sheds, storehouses, garages, chimneys formed a single unit bound together by strong, invisible ties. Even the flower beds, now mounds of frozen earth neatly encircled by low aluminium railings, were an indispensable part of the whole.

People hurried through the yard, going from shop to shop, in the brisk businesslike manner which seemed

characteristic of all the workers. The first place they visited was the tool shop.

"This is where I used to work," said Andrei as they climbed to the second floor. "I know every bolt and screw here."

They entered a hall lined on one side by a glass wall with little openings in it, like post-office windows.

"This is the C.T.R.—Central Tool Room," explained Andrei. "I wonder if Mikhail Terentyevich still works here. He was in charge—a fussy old chap."

He pushed one of the windows slightly open and called:

"Let's have a 300-millimetre file, Grandad! Our foreman's gone, I'll bring you a receipt later."

From somewhere inside came the grumbling voice of an old man:

"There's no grandads around here! The grandads are all home snoozing! And we don't give out tools without receipts. What would happen if I handed out files to everyone just on their word of honour?"

"I told you I'd bring you a receipt," said Andrei, trying hard not to laugh. He stepped back out of sight, enjoying the old man's vexation which increased as he approached the window. Suddenly Andrei stuck his head through the small frame and cried:

"Greetings, Mikhail Terentyevich!"

"Andrei!" replied the old man in astonishment.

"It's me, Mikhail Terentyevich! I just wanted to find out if you were still here. I remembered how you hated being called grandad and asked for tools without a receipt. I'll come inside for a minute. Go ahead, fellows, I'll join you in the shop!"

Even on the first floor they had heard the dull hum of the machines. The sound grew louder as they passed through the hall, where the glass wall of the C.T.R. was kept in a constant state of vibration. Now as they entered

the shop, Vadim felt engulfed in an avalanche of metallic sound.

The enormous room, flooded with electric light, was so full of machines that at first Vadim failed to notice the people, who moved silently, speechlessly, drowned in this sea of roaring metal. But presently he made out the men at each machine and a large number of people standing side by side at the far end of the shop—fitters working at long benches.

"The tool shop," shouted Kuznetsov, trying to make himself heard. "Here they make tools and dies ... anything the other shops order."

Between two pillars in the middle of the shop a streamer read: "Toolmakers! The equipment for Shop 5 must be ready exactly on time!"

"We're introducing line production in Shop 5," shouted Kuznetsov. "All the new equipment is being made here. Our best team of turners—a Komsomol team—is working here!"

The team consisted of three young men and two girls. Little red flags flew above their five machines. The team leader, Nikolai Sharov, a long-legged youth with a tuft of hair falling over his forehead, nodded to Kuznetsov and turned back to his work. Sergei went over to him. Halting at a safe distance from the spray of metal shavings and emulsion, he shouted to the turner:

"Where do you live?"

"Me? On Palikha Street," answered the youth in some surprise.

"Has the plant a hostel for young workers?" asked Sergei, taking out a notebook and edging closer. "Maybe you know someone who lives in the hostel?"

"A number of the fellows live there."

"Are they satisfied with it? How do they spend their free time?"

"They have a recreation room, something like a club," replied Sharov without taking his eyes off his machine.

"Ah, something like a club.... Do they dance there? Have they a radiola? Are the rooms kept well?"

For some time Sergei kept putting questions in a crisp, matter-of-fact tone and writing notes in his book. Sharov's answers were curt, for he grudged even half a minute of his working time. Sergei wore an expression of serious concentration.

"Why are you so interested in radiolas all of a sudden?" asked Vadim when the "interview" was over.

"That's my business," replied Sergei brusquely, thrusting his notebook into his pocket. "Shall we move on?"

They could not move on just then. Most of the workers here seemed to be friends or acquaintances of Andrei; some of them nodded to him from a distance, others came up and shook his hand, keeping him busy answering questions and introducing them to his new friends. Never had Vadim seen Andrei so excited and sociable.

They met the foreman too, a sturdy little man with a youthful, weather-beaten face, clipped grey hair and broad shoulders. Running his eyes over the students, he addressed Lagodenko with jocose severity.

"How's Sirikh making out at the Institute, eh?"

"Fine," answered Lagodenko. "We can't complain of him."

"He may even be awarded a scholarship," put in Sergei.

Andrei looked at him in surprise.

"What are you talking about?" he said.

"That's the truth, Andrei. Don't let it upset you."

"Good!" said the foreman, smiling and winking at Andrei. "In that case, he'd better go on with his studies. Otherwise I'd have him back here in the shop. Would you come, Sirikh?"

"I certainly would, Nikolai Yegorovich," said Andrei, also smiling. "But you wouldn't take me. I've forgotten everything."

"Tell me this, Nikolai Yegorovich," interrupted Sergei in a brisk manner, "have any of your workers entered the shop from office jobs, without any preliminary training?"

"My shop? No, not my shop."

"But others perhaps? What sort of work do such people usually prefer?"

Sergei had already taken out his notebook and fountain pen. The foreman shrugged his shoulders:

"It's hard to say. All sorts of work."

"I've often wondered if there was any feeling of rivalry between, let's say, fitters and turners?"

Lagodenko took Sergei by the arm and said softly: "Listen—that'll do! You're just taking up his time. Kuznetsov will tell you all you want to know."

"Of course, of course," nodded Kuznetsov. "When we get back to my office I'll answer all your questions."

Vadim was annoyed by Sergei's presumption, by his thick notebook, and by the easy, familiar tone in which he addressed everyone.

Finding a minute when no one but Sergei could hear him, Vadim whispered irritably:

"What are you trying to do — make yourself out a Reuter correspondent?"

"What's that?" asked Sergei in astonishment. "A correspondent? Stop your lecturing, can't you?"

"Can't you see how out of place this is here?"

"Stop lecturing me, I say!" said Sergei sharply, in his "special" voice. "I should do whatever I consider necessary."

Andrei and Kuznetsov turned round at these words, and Vadim dropped the subject and walked away.

When they returned to Komsomol headquarters and began discussing the literary circle and the lectures the

students were to deliver at the plant, Sergei continued to ask Kuznetsov questions which had nothing to do with the matter. Kuznetsov obligingly answered them to the best of his ability. Sergei made a note of everything.

When Andrei could stand it no longer, he said to Sergei gently:

"Listen, Sergei, we can't stay here all night. Let's settle our business first, and then you can ask your questions."

"Just as you say. I don't want to interfere. Let's settle the business."

"Then this is what we'll do," said Kuznetsov. "We'll go over to the administration offices and have a talk with our Party Secretary. He'll be sure to give us some good ideas; I've already told him about you."

At that moment they phoned from the tool shop to say that Sharov's team had fulfilled its order for Shop 5 a week ahead of time. The shop foreman asked that a "flash" be posted as soon as possible, announcing the team's achievement.

It turned out that there was no one to make the "flash," since the plant artist was ill. Kuznetsov phoned various people, pleading and arguing with them, but without result.

"Perhaps I could do it for you?" ventured Vadim at last.

"That's an idea!" put in Sergei. "He can do it as well as any artist. He'll dash it off in no time."

"Really?" said Kuznetsov eagerly. "I'd be very grateful. We want to post it before the first-shift people go home."

So Vadim was left alone in the office with a huge sheet of white paper spread out on the floor. He didn't regret remaining behind. He had no desire to speak to the Party Secretary in front of Sergei, whose bluster and arrogance irritated him and made him feel uncomfortable. "Never

again!" thought he to himself. "This is the last time I'll ever undertake anything with him. Lagodenko was right."

He took off his coat, spread a newspaper on the floor, lay down on it, and dipped his brush in red paint. This was familiar work—he had been doing it for the last fifteen years—ever since he entered school, it seemed. He would take special pains this time. But there was no getting away from it—the other fellows were now sitting in Party headquarters arguing, asking advice, drawing up plans and making decisions, while he was lying on the floor making a poster. At present he was engrossed in the problem of how to squeeze these last three letters into the first line. He gave a little laugh. "At least I'm doing something, while they're just talking. Especially Sergei," he thought.

Kuznetsov had asked Vadim to phone the shop as soon as the "flash" was ready. He did so and was told that someone would come for it. As he was dragging it to the radiator to dry, someone knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Vadim.

A young girl with a sheet of paper in her hand entered.

"Isn't Comrade Kuznetsov in?" she asked.

"No."

With a glance at the poster, the girl said, happily:

"It's you I've come to see, not Kuznetsov. They told me you were in the editorial office, but the door was locked. Here's what I've come about. Do you know Guskov? He's our Party organizer. He and the newspaper editor told me to ask you to draw a cartoon—a rush order. Rush, understand?" She kept drawing her delicate brows together in the effort to look serious. "Our situation is simply desperate. All day our work's been held up because Shop 8 hasn't supplied us with washers. One of their machines broke down and they've been fussing with it all day, leaving us with nothing to do. Three teams with

nothing to do! Think of it! Here's the text to go with the cartoon."

On a scrap of notebook paper was written:

"Shame on you, Ferenchuk! By not supplying Shop 12 with washers you threaten the whole plant with failure to fulfil its plan!

"Your indifference has brought the conveyor in Shop 12 to a standstill! All our workers demand immediate measures to rectify the situation!"

"Who is Ferenchuk?" asked Vadim.

"Don't you know? He's awful! Foreman of Shop 8. It's all his fault. Make it a colour cartoon, like your last one. I liked it a lot."

"Which one was that?" asked Vadim with a smile.

"'The Swan, the Crab, and the Pike.' About the supply department."

"Oh, I see."

"Make this one something like that. And begin right away, so that the second shift will see it when they come in. You're awfully young," she said all of a sudden. "They told me you were thin and middle-aged."

"I've put on weight during the last few days," said Vadim.

"And I've lost it," said the girl with a laugh. "All on account of those washers! What we've been through! I'm the dispatcher in our shop. I just happened to drop in here because it was on my way—Guskov asked me to. Listen, come along with me to Shop 8."

"What for?"

"I'll show you that Ferenchuk. You're going to make a cartoon of him, aren't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, it ought to look like him. It must!" she said impetuously. "A perfect likeness. He's so conceited, let him see himself as others see him! That cartoon on the supply department was very good, but none of the people looked like themselves. I wouldn't have known them if

you hadn't written their names underneath. Surely Ilya Markovich doesn't look like your Swan. Or Speranskaya like your Crab."

"But it was just—er—symbolic," said Vadim uncertainly.

"It doesn't matter. It ought to be a likeness. Anyone can tell you that. Well, come on!"

"I have to wait until someone comes for the poster," said Vadim. "And besides, how can we leave the office empty like this? Kuznetsov has gone to see the Party Secretary."

"We'll deliver the poster ourselves—right to the shop," said the girl promptly. "And we'll lock up the office and leave the key in the Trade Union Committee room."

Shop 8 was located at the far end of the plant grounds. So Vadim had a long walk with the girl, whose name he learned was Musya. She kept up a constant chatter on all sorts of subjects, beginning with washers and ending with films.

Finally they passed through the wide gate of one of the buildings.

"Is this it?" asked Vadim.

Musya looked at him in astonishment.

"Heavens, no!" she exclaimed. "This is Machine Shop 3. It's clear you don't know the plant very well, which means you're not much interested in production. You just draw pictures and collect money, is that it? Aren't you ashamed to be such a bureaucrat at your age?"

Vadim meekly muttered that he would spend more time on the grounds in the future.

They passed through the shop, crossed an empty corridor, and found themselves in a large, long room filled with the intermittent racket of presses. In one corner lay a heap of pipes of different sizes, all of them black

and shiny and smelling of grease. Steel rings, moulds and sheets of duraluminium stood in neat piles along the walls.

The contemptuous look on Musya's face told Vadim that they had at last reached their destination.

"Where's your Ferenchuk?" he asked.

"You'll see him in a minute."

On the door of a little room partitioned off by plywood hung the sign: "Shop Foreman." Musya pushed open the door and entered, followed by Vadim. Ferenchuk was writing at his desk. He was a middle-aged man with a bulging forehead and snub nose, wearing a faded jacket over a cheap cotton sweater.

"Here I am again, Comrade Ferenchuk," said Musya in dry, official tones. "When will you give us the washers?"

Ferenchuk raised grey eyes, listless with exhaustion. Rubbing his forehead with a broad palm, he said:

"Don't rush me, young lady. You won't get them before morning. I've already told Potapov. We're repairing the machine, understand? You won't get them tonight, but you will in the morning." He enunciated his words quietly and distinctly, as though explaining some simple matter to a child or a dull pupil.

"Why didn't you repair the machine on time? You've spoiled..."

"I told you not to rush me," repeated Ferenchuk wearily, with a shake of his head.

"But I shall," said Musya irately. "That's just what you need! And now you have only yourself to blame for the consequences!"

As they left the plywood room, Musya said to Vadim:

"Did you catch it?"

"Catch what?"

"His look. His face."

"More or less."

"Then hurry up and draw the caricature. Something like this—a pile of washers—washers are just little metal rings—with Ferenchuk sitting on top making daisy chains. The daisies'll be a nice touch, don't you think?"

"Perhaps."

"Only hurry up. The shift changes in half an hour. Do you think you can do it in fifteen minutes?"

"I'll try."

"Do. You can't imagine how important it is!"

The Komsomol office was still empty when Vadim returned. He made himself comfortable on the floor, quickly printed the caption, and ten minutes later the caricature was ready. He was not very much pleased with it. The only thing that looked convincing was the daisies. Ferenchuk, perched unnaturally on the pile of washers, turned out very fat and potbellied, like the cartoons of American capitalists in the *Crocodile*. Furthermore, Vadim had forgotten what Ferenchuk's hair was like, if he had any. So he simply put in a few vague strokes about his head that might be taken for hair, or just shading.

When he had finished the drawing, Vadim delivered it to Shop 12. He was met on the way by Musya and Guskov, a lean, fair-haired young man in clean overalls who looked like a foreman.

"Oh, that's marvellous!" exclaimed Musya. "It's the image of Ferenchuk—his nose, and forehead, and everything, simply everything—isn't it, Andrei Kuzmich?"

"Yes," nodded Guskov, "it does look something like him."

The caricature was posted in a conspicuous place at the entrance to the grounds. Many workers on the first shift were already leaving the plant. They gathered around the caricature and read it out loud, laughing approvingly. Vadim stood to one side, receiving real

satisfaction from the success of his picture. As he turned to leave, Musya ran up.

"Wait a minute," she whispered, catching him by the sleeve. "Here comes Ferenchuk. See how he takes it."

Ferenchuk, in a wadded jacket and olive-green cap, walked up to the caricature and stood studying it in silence for a long time. Then he glanced around.

"Your doings?" he said to Guskov.

"Why mine? It was his, the artist's," replied Guskov, nodding toward Vadim.

"What do you mean by such a thing?" cried Ferenchuk suddenly in a loud drawl, his face darkening. "What do you mean by 'Shame on Ferenchuk'? Why should I be ashamed? What have I done to shame myself?" he said furiously. "If you only stopped to think..."

"Calm down. Less noise and more work," said Guskov serenely. "You let the machine break down, and you're getting criticized for it. You don't know how to take criticism."

"What criticism? This picture on the wall?" Ferenchuk turned to Vadim, resolved to vent all his wrath on the artist. "It's easy enough for you—a splash here, a splash there, and the job's done! Do you call that work? The Trade Union Committee supported one specimen like you, but that wasn't enough for them—they had to add you! Cartoonists! Phoo! The hell with you!" With that, Ferenchuk buttoned up his jacket and rushed away.

Guskov laughed.

"Isn't he wild though? They gave it to him good!"

"All the better: the madder he is the quicker he'll get to work," said one of the workers.

"That's right," agreed another. "He'll get that machine going now if it kills him. There's really not so much left to do."

"Well, it'll be ready tonight, you'll see."

Now workers from the second shift began to gather

around the cartoon. They came in ever greater numbers, so that the entrance door no longer banged; it only squeaked as the crowd streamed through.

The room of the Komsomol Committee was locked. In the Trade Union Committee room Vadim was told that Kuznetsov was at a Party Bureau meeting and the students had gone home some time ago. Vadim left the plant.

He met the last few workers of the second shift hurrying down the street, taking final draws on their cigarettes before entering the gate. The plant was already far behind, but its low hum could still be heard, and a cloud of smoke, formless in the dark, hung above it. Sparks flew out of the chimney, whirling and fading in the air. Snow was falling, but it smelled more of petrol than snow. Vadim was hurrying past the spot where, in the daytime, lorries were loaded with finished products.

Strange that this street should be so quiet and empty, when just a few steps away thousands of people were gathered together, working in unison. But Vadim did not find it strange. He felt happy and tranquil, as though he had always known those people, and had often walked down this street, after his shift was over; and as though, like them, he was used to running to work, afraid of being late, taking last draws on his cigarette, pushing through the squeaking turnstile at the entrance.

How pleasant it was to tramp over the fresh snow—snow, at last! He filled his lungs with the crisp air.

Chapter 14

The new year was drawing near. On the Manège and Pushkin squares and the Square of the Revolution, carpenters were hammering all day long, putting up stalls for the New Year bazaars. A huge fir tree was mounted

on the Manège Square; it did not look small even in contrast with the Kremlin towers. It was trimmed with varicoloured lights, and when the workers tried them out in the evening, the tree looked like a giant crystal mountain from a fairy tale. Streets were filled with the holiday crowd. No one mentioned the frost or seemed even to notice it. Perky little boys from out of town did a lively trade in fir trees on the squares in front of the railway stations. Shops frothed with the momentary glory of tinsel and baubles. Now and then a smell of tangerines and pine needles was wafted in the air. Tangerines were on sale at every street corner, they were very plentiful this year.

It was decided at the last moment (important decisions are always made at the last moment) not to get up special parties for each class but to have one big New Year's party for the whole department, on the twentieth of December. In the entrance hall a poster stretching from ceiling to floor held out the following attractions:

GRAND NEW YEAR PARTY

Program

1. BRILLIANT SKITS
2. MUSICAL ITEMS
3. PERFORMANCE BY DRAMATIC CIRCLE
4. GUEST PERFORMANCES (STUDENTS FROM
OTHER INSTITUTES)
5. DANCING—FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR
IF YOU LIKE!

The day before, Lena eagerly told everyone she met: "Mind you're not late for the skits! Sergei's written such marvellous dialogues, we can hardly act for laughing. It's simply killing! You'll see how marvellous it is!"

She had only just begun to act in the skits, and could talk of nothing else.

But Vadim was late: somehow it had been particularly hard for him to leave his mother. He sat for a long time at her bedside, reading Veresayev aloud to her till at last she took the book from him and told him to go to the party. "I want to sleep," she said irritably. In reality she was sorry for her son, and wanted him to rest and amuse himself. Vadim had not the slightest desire for amusement, and went to the party in a far from festive spirit.

Approaching the Institute, Vadim could already hear muffled sounds of music and laughter. The windows of the club were brilliantly lit up and the figures of those seated on window sills were silhouetted against the light.

The hall was packed and the overflow crowded in behind the seats and at the doors. Among the spectators Vadim caught sight of a few boys and girls from the works; he did not at once recognize them in their best clothes. Andrei Sirikh and Kuznetsov, who were in a back row, made a welcoming gesture to Vadim which had a purely symbolic significance, there being obviously no room beside them.

Vadim made his way to the back of the hall and managed to find a place for himself on a window sill. The skits were in full swing. An examination as conducted by Stanitsyn, Professor of Russian History, was being parodied on the stage. Stanitsyn himself, a tall, grey-haired old man, was seated in front right up against the stage. Being hard of hearing, he held his hand cupped behind his ear, smiling, and shaking his head. Stanitsyn was very popular: a scholar of great authority, he was distinguished by extreme softness of heart and absent-mindedness. He was hauled over the coals for his indulgent attitude at every meeting of the Council of Studies.

Palavin himself acted Stanitsyn. Seated at a table in an old-fashioned long-skirted frock coat, with a cotton-wool wig on his head, he asked in a plaintive, reedy voice:

"Tell me, dear boy, what sea was the theatre of military operations during the period of the Crimean War from the years 1853 to 1856? And what were the dates of these battles?"

The examinee made some reply, but his voice could not be heard for the burst of laughter in the audience. When the noise died down, the student repeated thoughtfully:

"What sea?"

"Yes. Which was it? Come now! The B-b-b..."

"The Black Sea, Professor?"

"The Black Sea, dear boy! Quite right! Well, the dates you know, of course! Well, then—now tell me—what was meant by horseless peasants?"

"Horseless? I suppose they were peasants who had no—er.... What d'you call 'em...."

"Well? Who had no.... Who had no hor...."

The student made a happy guess:

"Horses!"

"Horses, of course!" beamed the professor. "Quite right! Splendid! Let me sign your—er—register."

Amidst general laughter Stanitsyn shook his fist at the actors, as if in jovial assurance of future severity. The next episodes were parodies on the work of the editorial board, a meeting of the club council, the distribution of rest-home passes, and other subjects drawn from institute and hostel life. The skits were a great success. Vadim could see the teachers in the front seats laughing, among them Miron Mikhailovich Sizov and, next to him, Rostovtsev, the director of the Institute. Biryukov, assistant director, a plump little man with a bald, gleaming skull, was waving his handkerchief helplessly in fits of shrill laughter.

The last item touched upon the prolonged argument between the Institute and the Chemical Supplies Trust, the offices of which occupied a part of the Institute's

ground floor. The Institute was making justifiable efforts to get "Chemical Supplies" ejected, the latter having moved into the premises temporarily, during the war. At all meetings Biryukov declared: "the question will be settled in the next few days—our side is winning," but the matter had been dragging on for over two years, and "Chemical Supplies" was still there.

A huge cardboard megaphone appeared between the two halves of the curtain, and Alexei spoke into it in the voice and intonation of a popular sports commentator.

"And so here is an account of the football match between the two Moscow teams—the 'Reclaimers' and the 'Usurpers'. The battle was launched some two-three years ago, but the score hasn't been opened as yet. The 'Reclaimers' are attacking now. . . . The top forward, Rostovtsev, has just made a perfect pass to Biryukov, and he's sent it in a flash to the Moscow Soviet. . . . Now he gets a beautiful pass from the Moscow Soviet on the go! Well. . . . Come on, hit it! Hit it! Oh, he's just dancing round it. He's hit it!!! But, what's that? Fancy bungling a kick from such a wonderful position! . . ."

The commentator went on in this spirit for some time, and the enthusiastic approval of the audience grew with every word.

His closing words were almost lost in the general laughter. When the megaphone disappeared and the applause died down, the smiling Alexei and Palavin came from behind the curtain, bowing and pointing to one another. Palavin was in a new light-grey suit, fashionably long and baggy, in which he created a most imposing appearance. He looked like some celebrated actor.

The skits were over. In the interval, Vadim went out into the corridor to look for Andrei and Kuznetsov. They were with a very young fair girl in a blue dress.

"This is my sister Yolochka, Vadim. I want you to meet her."

"Olga, not Yolochka," said the girl, looking severely at her brother.

She had great, steady eyes, as blue as Andrei's, and looked no more than seventeen.

"How did you like the skits?" asked Vadim.

"I liked them awfully. There was only one thing I didn't quite like."

"What was that?"

"The way the author behaved. What's his name, Andrei?"

"Palavin, Sergei Palavin. You don't know anything about him. You've got into the habit of judging things you know nothing about, Olga!"

"Oh, but I do! I was watching him before the concert, in the corridor. I didn't like him, and that's all!"

"An excellent argument!" laughed Andrei. "You didn't like him, and that's all! She's always like that!"

"Why shouldn't I be? I believe in first impressions," said Olga, with an obstinate shake of her head.

"What was it you didn't like about our author?" asked Vadim.

"He's so—flashy."

"D'you mean his clothes?"

"No—he's flashy in every way. I can't quite explain what I mean."

"There you are!" laughed Andrei. "The Delphic oracle has spoken, and it is for you to unravel the meaning."

Olga went on, without so much as a glance at her brother.

"But he's probably awfully popular. Especially with girls. He is, isn't he? Do tell me—my brother never notices things like that. He considers himself above them."

"I think he is," said Vadim, smiling.

He liked the way she talked to her brother, indeed he liked her way of talking altogether—youthfully serious, and a trifle naive.

"Sergei and I keep meaning to go and see Andrei. If we ever do, and you get to know Sergei better, I think you will change your opinion."

"Perhaps. He's talented, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's very gifted."

"He's a brainy chap," said Kuznetsov, nodding gravely. "When we had a meeting at the Party Committee he did most of the talking, and what he said was very sound and practical. You mustn't misjudge him, Olga." Suddenly he smiled, rubbing his hands together in sincere admiration. "What a performance! It's ages since I laughed so much! It was fine!"

"Perhaps it was. I don't know," said Olga quickly. "I laughed myself, of course. Our performances are never so amusing."

"Where are you studying?" asked Vadim.

"At a technical college. Alexei imitated that commentator marvellously!"

The corridor was getting more and more crowded. There was a large group of students and guests in front of the wall newspaper, admiring the New Year caricatures.

"Where's mine? What have they made of me?" asked Ivan Antonovich, smiling into his red beard, as he pushed his way up to the newspaper. "Where am I?"

"There you are, Ivan Antonovich! See?" cried someone delightedly. "And there's Kozelsky!"

"Good heavens, how ghastly! Why have you drawn Boris Matveyevich in monastic attire?"

"That's the garb of a medieval *scholasticus*, Ivan Antonovich. It's copied from the textbook on Western Literature."

"I see-e-e! Didn't he mind?"

"Oh, no, he just laughed! It's a friendly caricature."

"Friendly, is it?"

Krechetov laughed loudly and infectiously.

Spartak came up in a new black suit with a brilliant tie, triumphantly leading Shura by the hand. When he saw Kuznetsov he forgot his wife for the moment and, seizing Kuznetsov's elbow, drew him aside. The next minute his excited voice could be heard:

"No, Pavell! No, no! Listen! You can perfectly well apply to the Lecture Bureau, that's not the point! That's not what I meant. . . ."

While Vadim was talking to Olga, he suddenly caught sight of Lena. She was coming upstairs, apparently from the refreshment room, talking rapidly to Max at her side. Max was offering her sweets from a paper bag, which he held in front of him in both hands. He was in his eternal ski suit, but had a tie on. He never took his eyes off Lena's face, smiling blissfully, drinking in her words; his face, red, and even sweating slightly from excitement, appeared to Vadim stupid and needlessly ecstatic. Lena did not see Vadim, and was soon lost in the crowd. Only then did Vadim realize that he had not seen her on the stage. No doubt she had acted in the first scenes, the ones he had been late for.

Soon after, the bell rang, announcing the concert. Vadim got a seat beside Andrei. It was very hot in the hall, despite the open ventilation panes in the tops of the windows. It was still noisier and more crowded, many of the audience had evidently stopped longer than was good for them in the refreshment room, and were now wandering about the hall, cracking jokes and laughing.

At last everyone was seated and a first-year girl student, acting as master of ceremonies, announced the beginning of the concert. The first numbers were by guests— young Bulgarians from the Moscow Conservatory. They wore their vivid national attire—the girls in long bright-coloured skirts, the boys in baggy trousers and high caps. They sang plaintive Bulgarian songs followed by gay Russian melodies, and whirled round in the mazes of their

national dances. The guests were enthusiastically applauded, and called back again and again. Vadim liked the boys particularly—tall, with gleaming teeth and tanned, pleasant faces. Then the girls ran down into the hall and began sprinkling pink Kazanlik water over the audience. Those sitting in the back seats jumped up, and there was a moment of joyful confusion. Everybody wanted to be sprinkled with scent. The perfume of rose water, and the smell from the branches of fir with which the walls were decorated, blended in a delicate fragrance reminiscent of spring meadows.

"More! More!" cried the students, especially the girls. The dusky, smiling Bulgarian girls held out their bottles neck downwards, to show they were empty.

Many and various numbers followed—scenes from plays, dances, recitations. And suddenly Lena made her appearance.

She wore a long dress of dark crimson silk, with gleaming ornaments at the throat, and arms bare to the shoulder. She sang songs by Glinka and Chaikovsky. Her voice was not very powerful but it was soft and pleasing (a "lyric soprano," she called it) and she sang well, there was no denying that.

Looking at the rosy face beneath the unusually high hair-do, the delicate lips, which trembled ever so slightly as she sang, and the misted eyes, wide-open but unseeing, Vadim was astonished to find that he was as calm as if he had never seen her before.

"How pretty she is!" said Olga softly. "Who is she?"

"Lena Medovskaya, from our group," replied Andrei. "Thank heavens you find somebody to admire!"

Vadim's heart gave a leap at Olga's words. His eyes, too, suddenly misted over, and he could no longer see Lena's face; it melted, grew blurred till it was nothing but a brilliant spot of light.

The unfamiliar young voice rang out mournfully,

relating something utterly comprehensible and simple, telling how a song rose between heaven and earth, and how all who heard it remembered someone, and sighed. Surrendering to this melodious power, Vadim felt a strange warmth steal over him, as if he were no longer in the hall, one among many, but alone, walking barefoot along a warm, sunny path. And a voice poured out from above, between heaven and earth, calling, calling to him. . . .

Lena's face suddenly became so dazzlingly bright that it almost hurt the eyes to look at her. She bent her head. A storm of applause broke out, and it seemed to Vadim that the whitewashed ceiling with the two blazing chandeliers was about to fall on his head. He did not cry "encore!" with the rest. He suddenly longed for the concert to be over, so that he could see her close, beside him, and say something kind and loving to her. Why, he hadn't even spoken to her today. . . .

At last the concert was over. The chairs were hastily stacked against the walls to make room for dancing. Alexei and his accordion appeared, somebody sat down at the piano, and the dancing began. Olga danced with Kuznetsov. She looked just a frail little girl beside him, but her movements were so light and confident that she seemed to be dancing alone while he, tall and ponderous, was for some reason stumping awkwardly beside her. Glancing at her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, Vadim told himself she was surely the youngest and happiest person in the room.

* He did not want to dance. Involuntarily his eyes sought Lena among the dancers, but she was nowhere to be seen. Competitive solo-dancing began: a freshman, a Georgian, danced the *Lezghinka*, and Lagodenko did a hornpipe, but the prize went to Ivan Antonovich and Olga

Markovna, who went through the paces of a mazurka in true ballroom style. Palavin made his appearance in the hall, advancing quickly among the couples and obviously looking for somebody. "He'll come to me in a moment and say: 'Why aren't you dancing, Romeo?'" Vadim told himself.

And Palavin really did notice him and rushed up to him.

"Oh, Vadim!" he exclaimed joyously. "Sombre and enigmatic as Childe Harold! Why are you standing there doing nothing?"

"I choose to."

"You must dance! Just look—" he made a sweeping gesture, "just look at all this spontaneous gaiety going on around you! Why don't you make up to somebody—say that girl Kuznetsov was dancing with? See her? Young, fresh, her eyes sparkling.... Probably some Stakhanovite operating at several lathes simultaneously, turning out two hundred per cent." He winked at Vadim "Go and talk to her—do!"

"You don't need to teach me what to do," said Vadim, and taking Palavin by the shoulders, he turned him around.

"You're a bear. Have you seen Levchuk?" laughed Sergei.

"He was here not long ago."

"Sizov needs him urgently. I'll be back in a minute...." and he disappeared in the crowd as suddenly as he had appeared.

Just then Vadim caught sight of Musya, the dispatcher in Shop 12. She came up to him, examined him from head to foot, and said in astonishment:

"Hullo! Were you invited too?"

"Why, yes," smiled Vadim. "How's Comrade Ferenchuk?"

"Oh, you can't imagine what an effect it had on him!

They brought us the washers that very night, at half past eleven! And he came running into our shop shouting: 'But don't think it was that fool caricature of yours made us do it! It was just because we had the machine repaired!' He went to Guskov and begged him to take down the caricature. 'You've had your fun! Take it down!' he said."

"And did you?"

"Of course. He's not really a bad sort, Ferenchuk, only he's stubborn. Tell me, how is it I never see you at meetings? Don't you belong to our organization?"

"No, Musya. I'm a student. Come and dance, and I'll explain everything."

Long after midnight Lipatych, the drowsy cloakroom attendant, appeared in the half-empty hall and announced that it was time to turn off the lights. And Vadim never saw Lena. Marina told him someone had seen her put on her coat immediately after the concert, and go out. Only when the lights were extinguished and a noisy queue began to form in the cloakroom did Vadim realize that he had been cherishing secret hopes the whole evening, hopes which vanished as they had come—secretly, sadly, shamefacedly.

Vadim went home with Sergei for the night. Everyone in the flat was fast asleep, and Sergei let himself in with his own key. Roused by the noise, Irina Victorovna came out of her room in a dressing gown, whispering a greeting to Vadim, and asking:

"Was it fun? How were your skits, Sergei? Were they well received?"

* "They were, Mother, they were! Full house!" said Sergei, yawning loudly. "Make up a bed, quick! Vadim is staying the night with us. Make up a bed for him on the sofa in my room."

Sergei was a little tipsy, and seemed to have no desire for sleep. He walked about the room barefoot for a

long time, smoking his pipe and talking to Vadim. And Vadim was in that state of profound exhaustion when sleep is out of the question, since the time for it has passed and daybreak is near, yet one does know what it is one wants. Whatever Vadim wanted, it was certainly not to argue with Sergei.

The talk at first was of trifles—the “Chemical Supplies” episode, football fans, and the different ways they displayed their enthusiasm. Sergei declared that most fans were empty-headed and worthless—a danger to society. Look what a lot of mental and physical energy they wasted! And where did all this energy go? It literally vanished into thin air.

“Our Spartak’s a fan, too,” he said. “Know where I first met him? At the stadium. And now he’s factory fan.”

“I think we’re just as much fans as he is,” said Vadim.

“Of course we are. Did he buttonhole you today? He didn’t? He came up to me five times. He wants me to arrange a lecture on Soviet youth at the plant. I was fool enough to mention it at the Party Committee. I said a lecture of that sort might be a good idea, and Kuznetsov can’t let me alone about it. It is a good idea, of course, and you’d think they’d be grateful for the suggestion, and not keep on at me about it. Instead of saying thank you, they say: ‘Another little job for you, go ahead and do it!’”

“You said yourself, Sergei, that you ought to spend some time at the works.”

“Well, and didn’t I? Perhaps I’ll go there another couple of times. I took a look at the people....”

“In one day?”

“That’s quite enough for me. I wanted to see what a plant looks like three years after the end of the war. And as I have a general knowledge of plants, all the changes which have occurred since then strike me instantly, don’t

you see? You must remember my work took me to all sorts of factories, brought me into touch with people, taught me a lot about production. A supervisor has to be on the move all the time, you know...."

"Were you a supervisor? I thought you were a technician."

"It's all the same—supervisor or technician. As a matter of fact, I was really supervisor, but listed as a technician. But that's not the point. The thing is I've made up my mind to write a novel...."

"But do you know the actual work process? Have you ever run a machine yourself?"

"I know all that," said Sergei, sitting on his bed. "But it's still more important to know how to write about workers. That's the chief thing. How to write! That's the most important thing of all—everything else... everything else is just..." He thrust a finger into his mouth, poking at the inside of his cheek and then released the finger with a noise like the popping of a cork. "See what I mean?"

He laughed softly, throwing himself back against the wall, and beating a tattoo with his bare feet on the floor. It was too dark for Vadim to see his expression but he could feel that Sergei was looking fixedly at him.

"And what are you writing a novel for?" asked Vadim.

"What for?" After a moment's pause, Sergei added softly: "For myself."

"He's drunk," decided Vadim.

There was another short pause, and Vadim said: "You drunk?"

"Me? Not a bit!" Sergei laughed. "I'm as fresh as the buds in May. If you were a girl, now..."

He laughed, beating his tattoo again.

"Get into bed and go to sleep," said Vadim.

"Don't want to! Am I talking a lot of tripe? Very likely. But you're not a girl, after all, as I have already

noted with regret. You don't understand people, Vadim. That's your misfortune."

He got up, yawning, to fill his pipe. Yes, he was certainly drunk, and Vadim felt it would be useless to continue the conversation. But he could not resist asking:

"What makes you think I don't understand people? Is it because I don't understand you?"

"No, my lad, that's not it! They say if you study only one woman—your wife—you can understand all women. But to know and understand people you need a special power of identifying yourself with others and you need to be able to think independently."

"You, of course..."

"Me? Oh, yes! I can identify myself." He approached Vadim and shook his outstretched fingers like a dark fan in front of Vadim's face. "And there's nothing on earth you can conceal from me."

Vadim suddenly laughed.

"You're definitely drunk. Or else you're identifying yourself very skillfully with a drunk."

"Tommyrot! You don't know people!" repeated Sergei, raising his voice. "Just you tell me who will benefit by all this fuss and excitement about the plant?"

"What do you mean? We will... they will."

"Rubbish! It's for nobody's benefit but Galustyan's, to get him a pat on the back in the District Committee, or perhaps a write-up in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. He's a deep one! From the back he looks like an old country woman, but he's a sly devil!"

"That's a lie! Spartak's a sincere, decent chap!"

"He's got a back like an old country woman, with narrow, stooping shoulders," repeated Sergei stubbornly.

Vadim leaped to his feet and flung himself on Sergei, pushing him on to the bed.

"You go to sleep! I'm sick of your ravings. D'you hear me?"

Sergei made no reply. For some time he sat motionless on the side of the bed, then he rose slowly and crossed on tiptoe to the sofa. Sitting on the edge of it, he cautiously placed his hand on Vadim's blanket and whispered:

"Tell me honestly—do you love Lena?"

"Now what!" muttered Vadim, starting with surprise.

"Ah-ah, you do!" whispered Sergei, laughing noiselessly. "And if you love her, it means you believe in her. No doubt you think of her as the ideal girl—that's what they used to call it, wasn't it?"

"No, I don't. What rot you talk!"

"Know who took her away from the party tonight? You don't? It was that fellow from the dramatic school. The curly-haired one with slanting sideburns. She went with him to a party at his school. How d'you like that?"

"Did she?" said Vadim hollowly.

He felt hot, and for a moment it seemed as if this strange conversation, Palavin's whispers, and his pale face, a mere gleaming mask in the darkness, were all a bad dream, which he must shake off.

"There's your knowledge of people!" whispered Sergei triumphantly. "She's just like all the rest. Perhaps even worse. Her figure's all right, but in all other ways she's just like the rest. And figures only count on the beach."

"In the first place you're the one who doesn't know her," said Vadim. "You're a cynic, a filthy..."

"Me a cynic! And what are you—a saintly idealist? D'you want me to turn her head in three weeks? No, in a fortnight! What'll you bet?"

Vadim said nothing.

"I'll prove to you that she's just like all the rest of them, even if her dad does ride in a 'Pobeda.' Well? Will you take me on?"

Vadim said nothing.

Sergei laughed and got up from the sofa.

"Cynic!" he muttered, wagging his head. "I'm probably a great deal purer than you. I only told you to show you how little you understand people. And you don't understand Spartak, or Andrei, or that ass, Lagodenko, with his sailor's lingo...."

"You shut up, or I'll..." began Vadim, in a voice that silenced Sergei instantly.

He went over to his own bed, lay down, and drew the blanket over his head. There was silence till morning.

When Sergei woke up, he saw that the sofa was empty, with the bedclothes and pillow folded and neatly set aside. Irina Victorovna said Vadim had got up very early, asked her not to wake Sergei, and had gone.

"He wouldn't even take a cup of coffee," she complained. "He was in a terrific hurry. There aren't any lectures to-day, are there?"

"In their group there are," muttered Sergei, and turned over on his side.

He had a splitting headache, and felt an attack of heartburn impending. He decided he would not go to the Institute.

Chapter 15

Most of the students spent New Year's Eve among their friends. Vadim stayed at home with his sick mother.

There was a somewhat unusual New Year's party in the hostel. They all gathered in the girls' quarters, a big room, jokingly dubbed the "circus." When everyone had at last sat down amidst noise and laughter, Alexei rose and uttered the following speech:

"Brother and sister stipendiaries! We have met here in our beloved circus for a double celebration. In the second place we are seeing the New Year in, according to immemorial tradition, and in the first place we are celebrating the marriage of our respected Pyotr Lagoden-

ko and Raya Volkova. The first toast is to the newlyweds. Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" shouted all, standing up to clink glasses and cups with Lagodenko and Raya Volkova.

The latter, seated at the middle of the table, looked shyly from side to side.

"So that's why you put us here," muttered Lagodenko, blushing, perhaps for the first time in his life. "Come on, Raya, get up!"

He rose and Raya, her eyes radiant with happiness, got up beside him, gripping his arm.

"A kiss! A kiss!" cried gay voices.

Pyotr and Raya exchanged glances.

"Come on, kiss each other! None of your nonsense!" shouted Alexei severely. "You kissed on the quiet before, now kiss in front of everyone. Come on, now!"

The newlyweds kissed.

"Well, kisses for some people, and pie for others!" Alexei seized a huge piece of pie. "You go on kissing!"

"So you see we *are* having a wedding party, Pyotr," whispered Raya, furtively wiping her eyes. "And you said we'd have to wait two years..."

Lagodenko, also moved, smiled and frowned alternatively. Then toasts were drunk to the friends of the happy couple, to their future children, their future work. Gradually becoming accustomed to his new status and at last recovering his speech, Lagodenko attempted to discover whose idea this surprise wedding party had been.

"Never mind whose idea it was! It was everyone's," voices replied.

"It's an editorial secret," said Alexei.

"But it was Nina who made the cake with the initials on it," declared Galya Mamonova, laughing. "Just imagine—a member of the Bureau making such a lovely cake! It's simply delicious, Nina! Don't forget to give me the recipe..."

Spartak and Shura arrived just in time to drink in the New Year. The guests were already singing to the accompaniment of the accordion.

"Haven't you started celebrating a bit early?" said Spartak in astonishment. "Are all your watches fast?"

He was hastily told what it was all about and made to drink a penalty toast to the married couple. Just then a confused medley of sounds, interspersed with the hooting of automobiles, came from the loud-speaker on the wall. The radio had connected with the Red Square. All listened silently to the twelve slow and solemn strokes from the Kremlin tower, as people were listening throughout the country.

The new year had begun. Everyone stood up as the Soviet National Anthem rang out.

"Here's to the New Year, friends!" said Levchuk, raising his glass high over his head. "The New Year, bringing us nearer to communism."

Somehow, nobody wanted to dance that night. Perhaps this was because they had danced and made merry to their hearts' content during the last few days, or perhaps it was because these young people, who knew each other so intimately, felt an involuntary desire to talk about the things that meant most to them on such a night.

The past was recalled. Lagodenko remembered how he had spent the New Year at the front in 1943. He had been wounded during night fighting and remained in a German dugout which had just been captured in hand-to-hand fighting. An ambulance worker, quite a young girl, red-haired, dishevelled, had crawled towards him.

"My wounds were nothing much, but I was bleeding like hell. I could see this girl was half-dead with fright; it was very dangerous to crawl under fire like that. Well, she reached me. And when she saw me she was still more frightened. I was covered with blood, face and all, I could hardly open my eyes. . . . She bandaged me up, but

her hands were shaking and her voice sounded simply terrified. 'Patience, comrade, try and bear it a little longer,' she kept saying. I thought she'd be going off in a faint, so I said: 'You try and bear it! Never mind about me—do your job!' She got me bandaged up somehow or other. She had a flask with her, and suddenly I remembered it was New Year's Eve. Of course, it didn't mean anything, but the moment I took a sip from the flask I remembered it. And so we celebrated the New Year together—that red-haired girl and I. One sip to victory, another to our remaining alive, and another to our meeting again in the future. And that stuff was strong!"

"And it all came true," said Raya thoughtfully.

Others began to recall that New Year's Eve. Levchuk alone was unable to remember anything. At that time he had been lying unconscious in the hospital at Murmansk, with a terrible wound in his thigh.

"Surely there couldn't be war again?" said Raya under her breath. "When you remember all that..."

"And are you sure you remember 'all that'?" said Levchuk abruptly and stood up with a creak of his artificial leg.

"Me? Of course I do!" said Raya.

"Very well. Pyotr and Marina and I and millions of others remember 'all that,' too. And that'll make it difficult for any new Hitler to start another war. D'you remember Stalin saying that the horrors of the past war were still fresh in the memory of the peoples? And the forces for peace are too great for the fascists to overcome?"

"They're afraid of their own people, that's obvious!" exclaimed Spartak eagerly. "They know the ordinary people will never attack us. That's why they're pampering all sorts of fascist and Tito survivals and traitors of every kind. But they'll..."

"I've met Americans," interrupted Lagodenko. "In Austria. They've got lots of machines, that's true, but as for their being good fighters... what shall I say?..."

"Fighters? If they had something to fight for, you might be able to judge."

"That's true, of course. So far, the American soldiers aren't fighting in their own interest, the people's interest..."

"Oh, I don't want another war!" Raya said and laughed at the childlike spontaneity of her own words. "We've only just begun to settle down again, and life is improving and getting more interesting every year... and there are so many good things to come... There are, aren't there? And to think of war... again..."

Raya shook her head and moved involuntarily nearer to Lagodenko, who clumsily placed his heavy arm round her neck and grunted, frowning:

"Don't worry, Carrots. Everything'll be all right."

And everyone looked gravely and thoughtfully at Lagodenko and Raya, and for some reason fell silent. For a few moments everything was still in the room.

Then Galya Mamonova drew a profound sigh, hunching up her shoulders as if she were cold.

"Don't let's talk about war!" she exclaimed.

"D'you know what's just come into my head?" said Max vivaciously. "It's well known that we Russians are a peace-loving people. And it came into my head that there's evidence of that in our very language. Look—in our language we have one word for both peace and the world. I don't suppose that's true of any other language. German, French and English all have two words, one for each separate meaning. That's remarkable, isn't it?"

"It is," said Spartak, rising and pacing rapidly up and down the room, and pushing chairs out of his way. "But what exciting times we are living in! When you

look at the history of mankind it seems as if never before was there such an interesting, stupendous time—doesn't it? The old world is collapsing, giving at the seams, and the new world is being born before our very eyes! Our world—the world of peace!" Striding back to the table he cried:

"A toast! To all those fighting for peace in China, Greece, Spain, America—in the whole world! To the champions of communism! To all whose eyes are turned hopefully on us in these first minutes of the New Year! To all valiant people!"

And they rose and drank to valiant people throughout the world.

Vera Fadeyevna's guests left soon after midnight. They were not numerous: her brother and his wife, her neighbour, Arkadi Lvovich, and a woman friend with whom she had studied in the Timiryazev Academy. The supper table was littered with dishes and the remnants of food, and there was a lingering smell of wine, tangerine rind, and vanilla. In the room above, festivities were still going on, and muffled snatches of music, only vaguely resembling a song, could be heard, while feet stamped out drunken rhythms overhead.

Vadim began tidying up the room. Vera Fadeyevna lay on her bed with closed eyes. She was tired out by the supper table amenities, and the effort it had cost her to laugh and talk, but, most of all, by the incessant strain of trying to make people forget she was ill. She had not been able to get up, and the supper table had been moved up to her bed.

"Vadim, is there anything wrong between you and Sergei?" she asked suddenly.

"What makes you ask?"

"I heard him call you up this evening and invite you somewhere."

"He did, and I refused."

After a moment's pause, Vera Fadeyevna said ruefully:

"Because of me."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Vadim, frowning.

"All right, son."

Vadim did not want to tell his mother just now about his relations with Sergei, which had indeed changed of late. Vadim was by nature reticent about his affairs.

The only thing his mother knew about Lena Medovskaya was that she had come home with Vadim once or twice after studies. Vera Fadeyevna had often wanted to ask him who this beautiful, well-dressed girl was, but had refrained, knowing her son's reserved nature.

Tonight it seemed to Vera Fadeyevna that Vadim had taken little part in the conversation, that he was absorbed in his thoughts, and even upset, and she had supposed it must be because he had had to stay at home, instead of spending the evening with Lena. Perhaps he and Sergei had quarrelled about Lena! It sometimes happened between friends! And Vera Fadeyevna was sorry for her son, and kept thinking about him, about his friends, about that beautiful girl. And somehow, pity for her son mingled with a feeling of secret relief. Lena had seemed too good-looking, and too confident of her charms. Vera Fadeyevna had hoped for quite another sort of girl for her son. She was not quite sure what this girl would be like. Her dreams had taken no definite shape, neither as to face, voice, or even character—there had been a blend of many different faces and characters, and a sensation of something mysterious and familiar, which should bring happiness to her son and herself, and would inevitably change her own life.

She was glad to have spent New Year's Eve with her son. Such a thing had not happened for many years. Vadim had gone to big parties—at school when he was younger, at the Institute or the hostel after the war—or

he had visited Sergei or other friends living in spacious rooms, convenient for entertaining a crowd. Returning from these parties the next morning, Vadim had invariably told his mother all about them, at great length, and with gusto, never omitting a single detail, or forgetting any of his own observations. He had seemed to feel apologetic to his mother for not having spent New Year's Eve with her, and to wish to mitigate his guilt by conscientiously eloquent, lively narrations. But he had never mentioned any girl at any of these parties as interesting him more than the rest. Sometimes Vera Fadeyevna could not resist asking him: "Well, were there any pretty girls there?" "Of course there were," Vadim would reply imperturbably.

But Vadim was upset tonight not, as his mother thought, about Lena. He was upset about Vera Fadeyevna herself. She did not get any better. In fact, Vadim thought, she grew worse every day. He had watched her try to joke and smile, and then, suddenly turning pale, give her little cough, after which she would lie still for a moment with her eyes shut. His forebodings never left him the whole evening. And to these sad musings were added the thoughts of Sergei—Vadim was still haunted by the memory of the conversation in Sergei's room that night. He told himself that Sergei had said beastly things about Lena only because she had gone away from the party with some actor. Or because Sergei himself was hurt and angry with her. The idea of the actor stepping in hardly affected Vadim now. He would not let it affect him at all. He would stop thinking of Lena.

At one o'clock the telephone suddenly rang. Lifting the receiver, Vadim recognized the familiar, melodious voice:

"Vadim—were you asleep?" Then came Lena's laugh. "Happy New Year!"

"The same to you," he said, his voice a little shaky from surprise.

"Are you having fun?" She laughed again. Her voice was drowned by extraneous noises, by the sound of strange voices, and confused bursts of music. "There's such a row going on here, I can't hear a thing! Why don't you come over? Oh, do be quiet, boys! Kolya! Sergei, do..."

She laughed, said something to somebody beside her, and the next moment an unfamiliar, flirtatious woman's voice sounded in Vadim's ear:

"Are you dark or fair, Vadim?"

Again laughter, noises, the sound of light blows on metal, and an unfamiliar bass voice: "Vadim, old man, can you lend me a hundred rubles?" And again Lena's laughing voice:

"They're idiots, Vadim, they're all a bit tight."

"I understand. Well, good luck..."

He hung up. His mother was asleep already, and he decided to go to bed himself.

It was the first time since the war that he and Sergei had not been together on New Year's Eve. And the chief reason had not been his mother's illness--how difficult and hoarse her breathing was, as if she had a heavy weight on her chest. She was muttering something in her sleep: "My God, my God!" How could one go to sleep while she was so restless? He and Sergei had become almost strangers. Too bad that Lena should be mixed up in this complicated situation!

The telephone rang once more, with sudden shrillness. Again lifting up the receiver, Vadim heard Spartak's light, energetic tenor:

"How're things, old man? Happy New Year! We've been drinking your health--yours and Vera Fadeyevna's. Give her my regards."

His voice, too, was interrupted by other voices and laughter.

After this everyone spoke to Vadim in turn: Lagodenko, Nina, Levchuk, Alexei, Max, Raya. Rashid was the last.

"Hey, Vadim! Happy New Year to you! Can you hear me?" he cried gaily, and then said something rapidly and sibilantly in Uzbek. Somebody apparently tried to take the receiver away from him, for Vadim heard him shout: "Who are you pushing? Let me speak! You big Russian Chauvinist!"

And above the laughter again came Lagodenko's booming voice:

"Vadim! Dear old Vadim! What the hell! Greetings to your mother! Tell her my wife and I mean to come and see you tomorrow. That's all!"

And a quarter of an hour later, when Vadim was in bed, Andrei rang up. His voice was faint, almost inaudible. After he had wished Vadim a happy New Year, he spent a long time trying to explain why it was so difficult to hear. He was calling up from a public telephone at the bus terminus, where he and Olga had been skiing. They had been celebrating the New Year, too, and had gone out to get a breath of fresh air before going to bed.

"Is it snowing in Moscow?" came Olga's voice, faint and distant.

"No. I mean I don't know."

"It is here! Thick snow, and ever so warm..."

After Vadim hung up the receiver he was sure he would not be able to sleep. He felt a sudden desire to go out, to go skiing in the snow, to laugh with a friend, to sing. He began to think about the long, inscrutable year ahead, which would bring skiing and snow, and then spring, summer nights with shooting stars, rainy evenings, and autumn storms. This New Year was only an hour-and-a-half old!

Vadim went to the window and drew the curtain. It was snowing heavily. The street lamps gleamed faintly through the white flakes.

Chapter 16

It suddenly turned very cold in January. For a whole week a cloudless, blue sky, faintly tinged with a frosty mist, had hung over Moscow. The pavements were dry. If you put your hand beneath your eyes, and looked only at the roofs and the sky, you might have thought summer and not winter had come to town, so blue and utterly cloudless was the sky, so gaily did the crimson roofs sparkle in the sunshine.

But when you looked down, all was winter—and such a wintry winter! It was hard to believe that there had ever been such things as hot weather, green grass, and people bathing. Pedestrians hurried over the pavements, muffled up to their ears, diving into the Metro with the one desire to get home as soon as possible. The trolley buses and trams moved on, blindfolded by the shaggy white rime on their windows. Warm air rolled out in a cloud of steam from the wide doors of the Metro. In the evenings, when this cloud was illuminated by the lights from the vestibule, it looked as if the whole underground was on fire.

Twenty-eight below zero.

But despite the frost, the life of the mighty city went on as usual, never letting up for a moment. Milling crowds covered the pavements. Militiamen with crimson faces fearlessly stood amid the roaring traffic, blowing their whistles and courteously imposing fines. And in doorways, in the entrance halls of cinemas, in the Metro vestibules, stood women vendors, very bulky in the white aprons pulled over their winter coats, crying:

“Ice cream!”

"Ice cream piping hot!"

"Polar-bear ice cream!"

On one of these bright, frosty days Vadim hurried off to the Institute for the first examination. It was a difficult one—Russian Literature, with Kozelsky examining.

Lipatykh, the cloakroom attendant, a tall, somewhat morose old man in a wadded jacket and an ancient, conical fur cap, was sitting behind the cloakroom partition reading the paper. He looked up at Vadim, who was helplessly fumbling with frozen fingers at the buttons of his light coat, with its sewn-on fur collar.

"What's that?" he asked sourly. "Is that a coat for a day like this?"

"It isn't, Lipatykh! And I have a winter coat, too!"

At last Vadim got the button unfastened. "It's all the weather bureau's fault. They promised a rise in temperature today."

Lipatykh took the coat and, shaking it with ill-concealed contempt, said crossly:

"Weather bureau! We didn't used to have such nonsense. You had the Christmas frosts, and the Epiphany frosts, and then came the Athanasius frosts, and all the rest. But they don't even speak of frost at all nowadays—at least not over the radio—it's cold waves and such nonsense. No wonder people can't make head or tail of it."

"Stop grumbling, Lipatykh," said Vadim, smiling. "Have any of our crowd taken their exams?"

"How do I know? They don't report to me. That one with the tooth, he's finished, I think. Came out running and leaping. And the one with the leg. . . ."

"With the tooth—that's Alexei, he has a gold crown, and with the leg must be Levchuk," guessed Vadim.

The long corridor was filled with that tense silence which always reigns when difficult examinations are going on. They were being held in the large lecture hall. A few

students were standing about, leaning against the wall; others, too nervous to stand still, were wandering down the corridor, having a last look at books, précis, and notes. Near the door stood a small group of students whispering together and reading aloud.

"Who's finished?" asked Vadim.

"Levchuk, Remeshkov, and Velikanova."

"What marks did they get?"

"Levchuk and Velikanova got 'five,' Remeshkov, 'four.'"

"What questions did they draw?"

"Levchuk drew—'Herzen and Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe*'; Alexei—'Koltsov and the romantic poems of Pushkin'; Velikanova—'Belinsky on Pushkin and Herzen's *Who Is To Blame?*'"

"Who's on the examination commission besides Kozelsky?"

"Sizov, Krechetov and representatives from the Ministry and District Party Committee."

"Do they ask other questions when you finish your slip?"

"Yes."

Vadim always came to his exams in a militant, almost reckless mood. Unlike the others, he could not look things up at the last minute, make notes in the margin of his précis, frantically search his memory and ask questions of his friends. He wanted only one thing—to get the business over as soon as possible, to find himself alone with his questions, his professor, and his memory.

Lusya Voronkova, alternately applying eye and ear to the crack of the door, announced in a whisper:

"Lena Medovskaya is answering. . . . She's stopped all of a sudden. . . . No, she's talking again."

"What questions did she draw, do you know?"

"Lusya, get away from there. They'll hear you," said Spartak disapprovingly.



He was walking briskly up and down the corridor, his strong hands clasped behind his back, his eyes on the ground. From time to time he would stop and wipe the palms of his hands on his handkerchief. Spartak never got less than "five" at an examination.

Andrei Sirikh was sitting on a bench in a corner of the corridor reading a newspaper. He never brought books or précis with him and was always as serene as though the exam were only another lecture. Palavin had not yet arrived: he liked to be one of the last.

Lena was to be followed by Galya Mamonova, Nina, Andrei, Spartak, two more girls, and then Vadim. This order was always strictly adhered to. Galya Mamonova agonized at the door, twisting her fingers and moaning under her breath:

"Oh, they say Kozelsky's ferocious today! And I don't know a thing!"

"Enough of your whining!" snapped Nina. "You're simply unbearable!"

"I like that! You know everything, of course..."

"Well, I know one thing for sure—you're a hopeless sniveller!"

"How can you say such a thing!" whispered Galya indignantly. "I only said I didn't know a thing! Not a blessed thing! Hurry up and tell me what Goncharov's *The Precipice* is about, girls! I read it when I was just a kid and never had time to read it again. Quick, quick!"

Someone began to rattle off the story. At that moment the smiling Alexei appeared in the corridor, a cigarette between his teeth.

"Hullo, martyrs! Writhing at the threshold?" He began chanting in a deep bass: "Behold the solemn portals! It is here that, on appointed days, the students do cower, consumed by fear..."

"Oh, shut up, Alexei! If you've finished your exam, get out and let us suffer in peace!"

"Don't worry, Nina, it'll all be over soon. H'm, where shall I go?" He stopped and mused aloud, tantalizingly: "To the movies? Or drop into the library to glance through the *Crocodile*?"

The door was flung open and out came Lena, her face flushed, her eyes unnaturally bright. The girls rushed up to her.

"How was it, Lena? What mark did they give you? What questions did you get?"

"A 'three,'" said Lena in a choked voice, biting her lips to hide their trembling. With a toss of her head, she walked quickly down the corridor.

"'Three?'" said Galya, stunned "What were her questions?"

"We must find out. Lusya! Run after her!"

Lusya hurried to the cloakroom, but returned presently to say that Lena had already left the building.

Kamkova, Kozelsky's assistant, opened the door.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Why doesn't anyone come in?"

"Oh, I'm afraid! I can't go in now!" gasped Galya Mamonova. "If Lena got a 'three,' I'll be sure to fail! I can't go in yet!"

"You're keeping the commission waiting! You're behaving like school children!"

Vadim was standing at the door.

"I'll go," he said, taking advantage of the momentary confusion.

"Very well," said Kamkova, stepping aside to admit him.

Vadim entered and bowed to the commission. The examiners sat at the long table, Kozelsky in the centre in a smart black suit, shaved and combed and radiantly pink, as though he were celebrating his birthday. He nodded stiffly to Vadim and gestured toward the question slips

spread fanwise on the blue broadcloth covering the table. Max Vilkin was sitting in the chair facing the commission, about to begin his examination.

Vadim picked up the first slip his hand touched.

"Number 18," he said, started at the loudness of his own voice, and walked over to one of the empty desks.

"*Who Finds Life Sweet in Russia?* I do!" thought Vadim to himself with a smile. He could find a lot to say about that poem. He felt equal to the second theme too: "Gogol's Contribution to the Development of Russian Realism." Instantly the terrific strain he had been under for the last few minutes relaxed. He could even lift his eyes to look about him.

Ivan Antonovich was sitting next to Kozelsky, his head on one side, stroking his red goatee and looking at Vadim over his spectacles. Vadim imagined that he even winked a keen blue eye at him. He was glad Krechetov was there. On Kozelsky's other hand sat Sizov, talking to a grey-haired man in gold-rimmed spectacles—the representative from the Ministry, most likely. Vadim recognized the representative from the District Party Committee—he often came to examinations. Now he sat whispering to Kamkova, laughing under his breath. Kozelsky was concentrating all his attention on filling his pipe. Max was still turning over the pages of his notes and clearing his throat.

Vadim jotted down a few dates and names relating to Nekrasov's poem. He would leave everything else to his memory. And now for Gogol. "Gogol's Contribution..." First he must speak about realism in general. About its themes, principles, artistic method. Belinsky on realism. And then—about Gogol, Gogol, Nikolai Vasilievich.... Suddenly Vadim's mind went blank. He had forgotten even the date of Gogol's birth. 1810—or perhaps 1818.... Well, he'd come back to that. First the most important things—*Dead Souls*, *Inspector General*.... What else?

The Nose. Ah, yes, *The Nose*. That was about how a government official had had his nose stolen. Then there was *The Marriage*. Was *The Marriage* by Gogol?

He felt that his memory was breaking up into bits, like a cloud torn by the wind. Nothing was left of it. Just nothing. And into this nothing crept only nonsense—Gogol was born in Nezhin. . . . Nezhin is famous for its pickles. What makes Nezhin pickles so exceptional? Gogol went mad. Gogol had a long nose. He looked like a woman. Gogol-Mogol. . . . The Great Mogul. . . . Enough of this!

Vadim suddenly felt hot. He unbuttoned his coat, took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. The panic lasted about two minutes. Then the first date returned to him—1809, the date of Gogol's birth. Vadim wrote: *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* was finished in 1830 and published in 1831-32. He gave a sigh of relief. The eclipse was over. Such a thing had never happened to him before. Everything now came back to him in a great flood of remembrance—more than he could possibly have written down. Apparently he had been more nervous about his encounter with Kozelsky than he thought.

Ten minutes later he was sitting before the commission. Vadim answered his first question quickly and easily. He loved Nekrasov and knew much of his work by heart. Sizov listened attentively. Krechetov kept nodding encouragingly. Kozelsky alone seemed insensible to what Vadim was saying, as if absorbed in his pipe—cleaning it, filling it, neatly packing it down with a flat thumb, taking a long draw, throwing back his head and sending a fragrant stream of smoke ceilingward. As he spoke, Vadim kept his eyes on Kozelsky's dry, scrawny neck, red toward the ears, white and goose-fleshy further down.

"That will do," interrupted Kozelsky suddenly. "It's clear that you know the first question. Proceed to the second."

Vadim had not told one tenth of all he knew about Nekrasov. Interrupted in the middle of a word, he lost the power of speech for a moment, and sat turning over his notes.

"What is your second question?" asked Kozelsky.

"Gogol's Contribution to the Development of World Realism."

"Pardon?"

"Gogol's—that is, of *Russian* realism."

"H'm—proceed!"

This time Kozelsky was more than attentive. He even leaned forward and fixed his eyes on Vadim. Suddenly his pipe flew up and he sat bolt upright.

"Just a second! You say that Gogol's contribution to world letters was his introduction of 'the little man' into literature. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"And you maintain that this was his contribution?"

"Not his only contribution, of course; but a very important one."

"You are very generous, my dear Belov, but Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol has no need of your generosity. He is great without it."

Vadim was flustered for a moment, but presently he said calmly:

"But I consider this to be a great contribution made by Russian literature in general, and by Gogol in particular."

"You do? Very well, prove your point, please."

Kozelsky made a sweeping gesture, as though opening vast fields to Vadim. After a moment's pause, he added in a shrill, excited voice: "Russian literature is too great to be in need of any embellishment. Before ever the poor clerk, Akaki Akakievich, was created, there existed the poor teacher Saint Preux, and Hoffmann's poor Anselm, and Sterne's characters."

"But we are speaking of realism, Professor."

"What about Dickens?"

"Dickens came later."

"Later than what?"

"Later than Pushkin, Boris Matveyevich," put in Krechetov. "Later than Samson Vyrin, later than Captain Mironov and Lieutenant Grinyov."

"We are not speaking about Pushkin," muttered Kozelsky irritably. "Very well," he went on. "*Revenons à nos moittons!* In what year was his *Selected Correspondence* published?"

Vadim answered. This was followed by an avalanche of Kozelsky's favourite questions: Where? When? In what publication? What was the editor's full name? Who was in charge of the magazine's literary criticism that year? Vadim was astonished at his own knowledge. He knew nearly all the answers. How had he learned them? It was clear that Kozelsky was just having a streak of bad luck, hitting on the things Vadim happened to know. The next question would be sure to stump him. Kozelsky seemed to be of the same opinion, for he probed his "factual knowledge" with growing zeal. Suddenly Ivan Antonovich stirred in his chair, gave a loud sigh, and said:

"Don't you think that's about enough, Boris Matveyevich? Don't forget we have twenty more students to examine."

"What's that?" said Kozelsky, as though roused from a trance. "Oh, very well. Yes, yes, of course. One last question and we shall be through. How did Gogol classify his play, *The Marriage?*"

Vadim said, "as a comedy," but it turned out that Gogol had called it "an extraordinary event in two acts."

"Now, you see?" said Kozelsky, throwing himself back in his chair. "Your knowledge of factual material is not faultless. I shall give you a 'five' because you obviously think for yourself, but remember one thing: never under-

take the solving of a complicated problem without first having a good solid basis of elementary knowledge. You must begin with A and go on to B, and C, and so on. Here you are," and he held out Vadim's mark-book.

Vadim took it without a word, bowed, and turned to leave.

He saw the pale, wide-eyed Galya Mamonova entering the room and heard one of the students out in the corridor whisper, "Good luck!" though she was beyond hearing. The minute Vadim crossed the threshold he was surrounded by his friends.

"How was it, Vadim? What did you get?"

"'Five,'" he answered wearily and hurried away. He was eager to put on his coat and go out. He didn't even notice Palavin who was sitting on a bench at the end of the corridor flirting with Lusya, the Dean's pretty secretary.

"I'm right, and I can prove it. I'll write it all down," he thought to himself as he walked over the frozen, lumpy earth in the middle of the boulevard. He kept his eyes on the ground and made a point of stepping on all the little crusts of ice between the ruts. "Has world literature created anything greater than Russian realism? Than Tolstoy? And how many great names there are! Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Turgenev, Goncharov, Tolstoy, Shchedrin, Chekhov. . . . It was Russian realism that gave us Gorky—and who can compare with him? How can that Kozelsky, dry dogmatist that he is, be expected to understand Gogol? He can only shut his eyes in that affected manner of his and recite what every schoolboy knows by heart: 'What Russian does not love a fast ride?' And it isn't Gogol he revels in, but the sound of his own voice. Father knew many things by heart, too, but he always kept the book in front of him because he was not making a show of his memory—he was too much in love with what he read. . . . Didn't that old fossil want to fail

me, though! It was only thanks to Ivan Antonovich that I escaped. And the way he demonstrated his erudition—Saint Preux, and Anselm, and those other musty specimens! Why did he have to drag in Dickens? Nobody denies the genius of Dickens, but his *Pickwick Club* can't compare with Gogol's *Dead Souls*. We'll fight this out yet! As soon as exams are over I'll get to work on my paper. And there I'll say everything that's on my mind. Ivan Antonovich will help me. It's one thing to take an examination, another to address the Student Research Society. I can speak up there, say just what I think. And I'll show him my knowledge of 'factual material'! He can't scare me with his ABC's!"

Vadim kept walking faster and faster, oblivious of where he was going. He only knew that the farther he went and the more he thought, the higher his spirits soared and the more confident he grew of his own strength and capacity for work.

Suddenly he felt an urge to return to the Institute, to his friends, to see them, hear their voices, and find out how they had done in the exam. . . .

Lagodenko had got a 'five.' He met Vadim outside the Institute and recounted at length how Kozelsky had tortured him (forty minutes! Raya had timed him!), and how he had managed to answer his subtlest questions, and how the representative from the District Party Committee had shaken his hand when it was over and Miron Mikhailovich had said jokingly: "How many pounds of literature did you lift for this exam, Lagodenko?"

Andrei had also got a 'five,' and was now sitting on the window sill patiently explaining something to the girls who had not yet taken their exam. Out of the room rushed Lusya Voronkova, gaily waving her mark-book over her head and chanting:

"A 'four,' a 'four'! Tra-la-la, what a beautiful 'four'! I want nothing more than this be-a-u-u-tiful 'four'!"

Catching sight of Vadim, she beckoned to him mysteriously and ran off to a secluded corner of the corridor. Vadim followed her.

"Listen, Vadim, we've got to help Sergei! He's in a stew. He was to have followed me, but he let Marina go first and he's still sitting there. He's as black as a storm cloud. He's sure to be plucked if we don't do something about it. He whispered to me when I went out: 'Find Vadim and tell him to write me something about Ryleyev.'"

"About Ryleyev? But he must know...."

"That's what he said. I heard it with my own ears. Hurry and write it and we'll send it in with Vera."

"About Ryleyev? But that's impossible!" repeated Vadim in astonishment. "You must have got it wrong. Sergei certainly knows Ryleyev."

"Don't waste time arguing!" whispered Lusya furiously, tugging at Vadim's button with every word. "A man's drowning, and you stand here philosophizing!"

"Sergei Palavin's gone up to answer," whispered someone at the door.

"Now, you see!" said Lusya. "It's too late now."

Twenty minutes later Palavin came out. He wore a sullen look, and his fair hair, always so carefully combed, was badly dishevelled.

"A 'four,'" he muttered between his teeth, making straight for the stairway. Vadim caught up with him there.

"What question did you draw?"

"As if you didn't know!" said Sergei, stopping and gazing with hostility into Vadim's eyes. "Voronkova told you."

"She told me some tripe about Ryleyev, but I didn't believe her."

"Oh, you didn't? Well, you should have. You just got scared. You didn't want to help me. I knew it—you never help a fellow when he's in a fix."

"In a fix, you say?" repeated Vadim after a moment's pause.

"Stop pretending, please!" said Palavin, making a face. "You'll start lecturing me about it being dishonest and all that. You know damn well I don't cheat—I've never cheated in my life! Never! But this time, when I—when it's a question of—Oh, what's the use of talking? I can see how it is."

With a wave of his hand, he started quickly down the stairs. Presently he stopped.

"I know whose work this is," he said with a toss of his head. "It's all that saint in spectacles...."

"What saint?"

"You know very well who I mean! He's a cheap, petty, envious nobody.... But this won't help him--and won't help you either, since you seem to be in with him." Palavin shook a warning finger. "Nothing'll come of it, you'll see! I'll take a re-exam."

"Who are you talking about? Why should you take a re-exam?" asked Vadim in astonishment. "And why the tragic tone? You got a 'four'—that's not so bad."

"Oh, you don't know, do you? You don't know that getting a 'four' makes you ineligible for the personal scholarship? But I'll take a re-exam! I'll talk to Sizov today and take the exam over again before the holidays."

"H'm!" Vadim suddenly frowned. "So that's what all the excitement's about? I honestly didn't know...."

Without answering, Palavin turned and went down the stairs. With his hair still rumpled and his sulky expression, he looked for all the world like a little boy in a tantrum.

Chapter 17

The midwinter exams were well under way. January was speeding past so quickly that it seemed to contain only six days—the six days of the exams. Vadim had only one more to take, but that was political economy,

the hardest of all. He would be put through this final ordeal on January 14, and then he could breathe freely.

He prepared for his exams alone, going to the Institute only for consultations with his professors. He preferred working this way—he got more done. Besides, he could not leave his mother, who had been feeling much worse of late. She breathed with difficulty, her temperature kept rising, and the doctors began to speak of sending her to the hospital.

As he listened to them discussing the case in the other room and tried to understand the wordy and involved explanations of Dr. Gorn, Vadim resolved to read up on the causes and development of the disease and its probable outcome. His helplessness, his inability to do anything for his mother but run to the chemist's and phone for the doctor, made him despondent.

He turned to the encyclopedia to see what he could learn about pleurisy. One evening, thinking his mother was asleep, he went to the bookshelves out in the hall and began looking through some old volumes that had not been touched for years.

"What are you looking for, Dima?" asked Vera Fadeyevna suddenly.

"Me? I was just. . ."

He broke off, not knowing what to say, and his mother remarked weakly:

"Those books are too old. Science is a long way ahead of them."

There was no hiding anything from her!

Vadim took a reference book on therapeutics from a friend and read everything it contained on pleurisy, pneumonia, and other lung diseases. He was particularly upset by two forms of pleurisy—purulent and exudative. The exudative form usually responded to treatment, but the purulent form often had a "lethal outcome"—that is, the patient died. It seemed to Vadim that his mother's

symptoms pointed more to the purulent form. But then he read that if a patient had the exudative form, an increase in the tympanic resonance when the mouth is opened and the sound of pottery cracking could be detached below the collarbone. Vadim understood only the words about the sound of cracking pottery. But they were of some comfort to him, for he had noticed that his mother had begun to speak very softly, and that sometimes her voice broke and assumed a very sharp, edgy tone. Undoubtedly this was the "sound of cracking pottery." In other words, she must have the exudative form of pleurisy.

But on the whole, he knew no more than he had known before, and the more he read, the more confused he became, tortured by new doubts and fears. Instead of reading up on political economy, he pored over medical books, thoughts of which filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else, despite the fact that the day of the examination was drawing near.

On the day before the examination, Vadim went to the Institute for a consultation. Never before had he felt so unprepared. During the consultation students asked Professor Krylov questions about things he had never heard of. At any other time he would have been greatly upset, but now he merely thought with weary indifference: "How have they ever managed to read so much?" He did not understand half the things they talked about. All his thoughts were of his mother. He sat, sombrely silent, until the consultation was over, then asked Nina Fokina for her notes and went home.

The door was opened for him by his neighbour.

"Dr. Gorn and another doctor are here," she whispered. "They're in the bathroom now. Go and speak to them."

Vadim threw off his coat and with beating heart headed for the bathroom. Dr. Gorn was standing smoking in the

corridor, while a tall, grey-haired man bent over the washbasin washing his hands, his back to Vadim.

"Ah, good evening!" said Dr. Gorn, making something like a bow with his ponderous body. His face was grave and his voice was less booming than usual. Perhaps his reserve was due to the presence of his senior colleague. "How are the exams going?"

"All right, thank you."

"Everything normal?—'up to scratch' as they say?" Dr. Gorn gave a little cough and glanced at Vadim out of the corner of his eye. "This is Dr. Andreyev—Sergei Konstantinovich. We have just had a look at Vera Fadeyevna."

Dr. Andreyev turned slightly, giving Vadim a glimpse of a round black eye, nodded, and returned to his hand-washing.

"This is how matters stand, Vadim," said Gorn. (He had never called him Vadim before.) "Vera Fadeyevna's condition is worse. We suspected infiltration of the left lung. But the X-ray shows no signs of this. However, her cough, her temperature, the pain in her side, and her perspiring at night have all increased. What conclusions must be drawn? That she probably has exudative pleurisy. Why do you look so startled? The disease is quite curable. In February your mother will be on her feet again. But there's another hypothesis...." Gorn sighed and compressed his full lips. "What if it isn't pleurisy? There are certain symptoms that make Sergei Konstantinovich suspect.... It is highly improbable, but still there is a faint possibility that Vera Fadeyevna has cancer of the lungs. We must put your mother in hospital, Vadim, and make a thorough study of her case."

"Cancer of the lungs?" repeated Vadim, going white.

"Yes, in which case we may have to resort to surgery," said Gorn quickly. "In the early stage of the disease, the patient can be saved by a surgical operation. Our suspicions may not be confirmed, but we must inves-

tigate. Sergei Konstantinovich is placing Vera Fadeyevna in the clinic of his institute. . . .”

“When?”

“We are expecting the car any minute.”

Vadim went into his mother’s room. Vera Fadeyevna was lying with her face to the wall. She turned her head when Vadim entered and gazed at him silently.

“How are things at the Institute?” she said at last.

“All right. Nothing new.”

“You look rather. . . Was the consultation a help?”

“Oh, yes!”

“You were such a long time.”

“It’s always like that before an exam. How do you feel?” He tried to speak in a loud, cheerful voice and find something to do with his hands. He sat down beside the bed and began to look hurriedly through his notes.

“Not very well, son. . .” said Vera Fadeyevna, closing her eyes. “Did they tell you they’re putting me in hospital?”

“You’ll be in better hands there.”

“Yes. And you’ll have more time for your exams.”

“I have plenty of time anyhow.”

“Well, now you’ll have more.”

“Nonsense!” he said. “I have only one exam left. In a week or two you’ll be on your feet, and then—do you know what we’ll do, mother?”

“No, what?”

“In the winter holidays you and I will go to a rest home. For two weeks.”

Vera Fadeyevna nodded slightly and gave a smile that went no deeper than her lips. She kept looking at Vadim with a sad, solemn expression.

“I remember sitting beside your bed when you were sick as a child—you were often sick—and telling you all sorts of silly lies to make you feel better. And you believed me and felt better,” she said, closing her eyes

again. "How long ago that was! And now the situation is reversed. . . . How swiftly life passes! Before you even notice it!" She seemed to be drowsing off, but suddenly her thin fingers gripped his hand for a second. "But I do believe you, son—and I, too, feel better. Of course, I'll soon be on my feet again!"

"The cancer, proceeding from the epithelium of the bronchial tubes, or occasionally from—from—something else—" remembered Vadim despondently, "develops un-intermittently, and always results in death. . . ."

Suddenly he felt choked and sighed convulsively. He gritted his teeth and closed his eyes tightly. The moment passed. He rose and said:

"Are you going to wear your dark coat?"

"Yes. Will you get it out of the wardrobe?"

He took the coat off the hanger and placed it on a chair near the door.

Half an hour later he was sitting next to the driver of the ambulance. Dr. Gorn was behind with his mother, and his incessant talk was cheering. The Tuberculosis Institute was located on a quiet old street beyond the Sadovaya Circle. The car drove into the yard and stopped in front of a lighted sign reading: "In-patients." The doctor and attendants led his mother away while he entered the office to fill out her papers. In ten minutes he returned to where he had left her. The doctor on duty, a fat, black-haired woman in pince-nez and with a faint moustache, said in a stern, masculine voice:

"Patient Belova is having a bath. You can't see her. And you can't wait here."

"But I haven't said good-bye to her! I'm her son!"

"Oh," said the doctor, and then, after a moment's consideration, "then wait here—no, over there—until she's had her bath. Then you can say good-bye to her."

Vadim entered a long, empty room and sat down on a bench. Something was sticking out of his pocket. It was

Nina's notes on political economy. Settling back, he opened them and read the first sentence: "Therefore the value of the commodity linen is expressed by the bodily form of the commodity coat..." A radio was playing somewhere. He listened to the music. Suddenly he felt sleepy, and even seemed to have dozed off. He was asleep and dreaming that he had lost his home. He had nowhere to live, he was out in a dark, empty field from which rose a stifling hospital smell....

Vera Fadcyevna appeared before him in a long bathrobe and bedroom slippers. She was attended by an old woman all in white except for the black stockings on her match-stick legs.

"Mother! Well, good-bye," said Vadim, going up to her. "Hurry up and get well!"

Vera Fadcyevna smiled, murmured something, and waved her hand. She seemed thin and shrunken beyond recognition in that voluminous bathrobe. When she was already quite a long way down the hall she turned to call back:

"Don't forget to pay Fenya for those lemons!"

"I won't!" replied Vadim, and nodded.

The lights from the hospital windows lay in yellow stripes across the trampled snow of the yard. Vadim wandered from building to building looking for the gate. In front of one block loomed a dark statue. "Whose?" he wondered hazily. On drawing nearer he recognized the high forehead and melancholy features of Dostoyevsky. Ah, yes, Dostoyevsky had been born and raised in this building. His rooms had been turned into a museum, it seemed. The hospital, the waiting room, the statue of the Russian writer ... it was all like a bad dream.

But it was not a dream.

It was the cold night of January 12. And on January 14 he had to sit for an examination in Political Economy. He felt the thick pile of notebooks in his pocket. His hands

were cold, and he thrust them deeper: No, it was not a dream. If he could only fall asleep and dream! Plenty of people were probably dreaming at this very moment. . . .

Vadim found himself on a wide, brightly-lighted street. In front of him a red traffic light blinked. Loaded trolley buses sped by. People came out of the shops and lined up in the newspaper queue. The woman in the stall kept muttering as she handed out the papers:

"Vechernaya Moskva . . . Vechernaya Moskva . . . Radio Program . . . Vechernaya Moskva. . ."

Her hands flashed like those of a conjurer. Vadim took a place in the queue, but presently left it and continued on his way. When he had taken a few steps he remembered that he had wanted to buy a paper, but he did not go back.

Suddenly he heard someone calling:

"Vadim! Vadim Petrovich! Comrade Below!" It was a gay, woman's voice.

He turned, Irina Victorovna was hurrying after him waving her hand.

"Racing along like a steam engine, and me after you! Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm just coming from the hospital."

"Your mother?" she asked in a frightened voice, the expression of her face changing instantly.

"Yes. They've just put her in," said Vadim, looking at Irina Victorovna as if she were a stranger. "They suspect cancer of the lungs."

"Good gracious!" she gasped, clutching her breast. "Do they intend to operate?"

"I suppose so. I don't know yet."

"Where are you going now?"

"Where?" He rubbed his forehead. "I don't know."

"Then come along with me. Do!"

He accepted the invitation. The idea of returning to his empty home terrified him. He preferred visiting Ser-

gei to remaining alone. Why had he quarrelled with Sergei? Ah, yes—he remembered. But how far away and how trivial it all seemed now.

"I've got to study," said Vadim. "I have an exam on the 14th."

Sergei seemed to have forgotten all about their quarrel. He was overjoyed to see Vadim, and when he heard what had happened, he grew grave and anxiously inquired about the disease, the hospital, the opinion of the doctors. In a word, he expressed the sympathy which people stricken by misfortune always accept as sincere.

"Spend the night with us," said Sergei. "Why should you go home?"

"Of course!" chimed in Irina Victorovna. "Do stay, Dima! We'll all have supper together and then you can study. Remember how you always used to do your lessons together when you were children? By the way, Vera Fadeyevna is in the same clinic where Valya works. Did you know that, Sergei?"

"Yes, but she works in a different department."

"That makes no difference. She could keep a friendly eye on her. I'll phone her tomorrow."

"No, don't bother," said Sergei with a frown. "I'll phone her myself."

"Very well, but don't forget."

After supper Sergei said he had to run out for a moment, but he would be back soon, no more than forty minutes. Vadim could start working alone and then they could go on together. All the reference books were on his desk—better than any library.

So Vadim remained alone in Sergei's room. Sitting down at the desk, he took out his notebook and read the same sentence: "Therefore the value of the commodity linen is expressed by the bodily form of the commodity coat..." And again it meant nothing to him. Again he was alone, and thoughts of his mother, or rather, the one

thought of his mother drove all other considerations out of his mind. How incongruous, how agonizing to sit here trying to make sense out of these *précis*, when there was only one thing of any importance now!

He began to study Palavin's desk. On one side lay a pile of papers covered with writing, the margins all scribbled over with faces and arabesques. The photograph of a pretty girl was propped against the inkwell. Next to it stood a loose-leaf calendar covered with notes: "Monday—Phone Kozelsky. Wednesday—Consultation. Tailor. Buy horsehair for the lapels. . . ." The same sort of calendar stood on his mother's desk. She had made the last note on December 10. The last. Something about flour to make a cake for the New Year.

Someone knocked softly at the door.

"Come in."

Little Sasha opened the door and remained standing at the threshold.

"Could you help me with an arithmetic problem?" he asked shyly.

"Or course. Show it to me," said Vadim.

"Just a minute!" Sasha ran out and returned a minute later with his notebook and arithmetic book. While Vadim solved the problem and explained it to him, he sat astride his chair, jumping up and down on his hands. To every question he readily responded: "'Course I understand!" and went on jumping.

"I understand when *you* explain," he said, when the problem was done. "Sergei always shouts at me and says I'm stupid."

Sasha went out, leaving Vadim alone again. Through the half-closed door he could hear Irina Victorovna saying sternly:

"Leave Vadim alone, Sasha! He's studying!"

And Sasha piped up:

"I've done all my problems."

Vadim walked up and down the room, looking at the books and the knickknacks on the shelves; at last he lay down on the sofa and took up the notes again. But they meant no more to him than before. He put aside the notebook and closed his eyes.

Two hours passed, but Sergei did not return. All the people in the house seemed to have turned off their radios and gone to bed. "Here it is—the dark, empty field," thought Vadim, listening to the silence about him. In another ten minutes he would die of despair, would go mad, jump out of the window....

Suddenly he got up, tiptoed to the door, quietly put on his coat, and went out.

Meanwhile, Sergei Palavin was sitting at Lena Medovskaya's desk reading aloud his notes on political economy. It was hot in the room, even with the ventilation window open, so he had taken off his coat and necktie. Lena was sitting on the sofa with her feet tucked under her, listening and wondering why he stayed so late. She didn't want him to go home, but she couldn't understand why he should make such an effort to help her, reading to her like this for two hours running. And he kept joking all the time, and was not at all like himself. She gazed at his head bent over the book, with the lock of fair hair curling over his forehead, at the fine, aquiline nose and the firm virile mouth moving energetically as he read. She did not understand the words, hardly even heard them, but her heart responded as if caressed by a soft warmth.

Vadim went to the hostel. He knew the students there would not be asleep yet. Life would be in full swing, especially with the examination coming. In the kitchen

he met Raya Volkova standing in front of a gas range, her hands crossed over the bib of her apron, her face wearing the sadly pensive expression with which housewives always contemplate kettles that won't boil.

"Vadim! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed, pleasantly surprised. "Is anything wrong?" she added, noticing his strained expression.

"I've come from the hospital. Mother's there."

"Is she worse?"

"They're going to operate—they think she has cancer of the lungs."

Raya went over and took his hand.

"And that's why you've come to us?" she asked softly.

"Yes."

"You did just the right thing. Go up to the circus. Everybody's there, studying. We're just going to have supper."

The girls' room was brightly lighted and full of people. Spartak was among them—he usually prepared for exams with the students at the hostel.

"Greetings to a fellow sufferer!" cried Alexei on seeing Vadim. "Have you decided to join our kolkhoz? Too late, Comrade Individualist! We've already covered the whole course—we're just going over it a second time."

"Vadim's probably been over it twice already and wants to do it a third time," said Marina Gravets.

"I haven't been over it even once," said Vadim. "I've come for help."

He sat down on one of the beds which had been drawn up to the table.

"Vadim's just come from the hospital," said Raya. "His mother's very ill."

Everyone was silent for a few moments.

"Have they found out what's wrong at last?" asked Spartak.

Once more Vadim told the story. He had no wish to tell it, and answered their questions as briefly as possible.

"I don't suppose you've done any studying at all, have you?" asked Spartak.

Vadim shook his head.

After a moment's consideration, Spartak said:

"Then this is what we'll do: Andrei, as our star student, will take charge of Vadim. We'll manage to review the material without him. You two work together the rest of the evening and all day tomorrow. I don't think Vadim will have any trouble getting through—he always made a good showing at the seminars and Krylov is fond of him. Only be sure to study tomorrow, do you hear?" he said to Vadim, shaking a warning fist. "One of us'll go to the hospital for you."

"I will," said Nina Fokina.

"All right. You can find out everything. Besides, it seems to me—I don't think..." Spartak sighed, and then, suddenly giving Vadim a clumsy hug, muttered: "Don't lose heart, Dima—even doctors make mistakes... often do... and somehow I can't help feeling..." unable to find words, Spartak merely gave Vadim a friendly shake.

"They have new methods now. Some sort of rays. They say they work wonders," said Max.

Andrei got up.

"Well, let's go, shall we, Vadim? We can work in the boys' room—it's empty."

"Oh no, wait a second," said Raya. "We're going to have supper first. Vadim needs warming up. Can't you see he's frozen?"

"Why not come and stay with us while your mother's at the hospital, Dima?" asked Alexei. "Why be a hermit?"

"That's right! Of course, move in!" said Lagodenko. "You can sleep on my cot and I'll double up with Alexei."

"We don't have to double up. He can sleep on mine and I'll sleep on the chest. I slept there for two weeks. A bed fit for a king!"

"Only there's ~~no~~ blanket."

"We'll give him ~~one~~." said Galya Mamonova. "We have an extra one."

"And we'll give ~~me~~ a pillow," cried Marina Gravets from over in the corner.

"I hadn't thought of staying...."

"Oh, come now, how can you live there all by yourself?"

"Well, all right, we'll see...."

They were now seated round the table, and Raya was pouring out the tea. Bread, sausage, and a cube of butter lay on a plate in the middle of the table, and each of the students used the only knife in turn. It was lively and noisy and jolly. With every gulp of the strong, hot tea, Vadim felt himself enveloped in a wave of warmth which spread to his very fingertips. His head began to spin—was it from the tea? Or was it the bright light, the noise, the friendly, familiar faces, with their smiles and bright glances?

He was dizzy, but he smiled. One of the girls handed him a large slice of bread and butter and a piece of sausage, and Vadim suddenly realized that he was hungry.

Fifteen minutes later he and Andrei were sitting in the boys' room at an ink-stained table which bore the marks of hot irons and forgotten cigarette ends.

"Therefore the value of the commodity linen is expressed by the bodily form of the commodity coat, the value of one by the use-value of the other."

"Do you understand?" asked Andrei.

"That? Yes," said Vadim, after a moment's consideration. "Because they are equal as values."

"That's right. Let's go on."

Chapter 18

The difficult month of January was drawing to a close. The last two weeks were unusually mild, with a light frost and hardly any wind—ideal weather for skating. There was much sun, and the ground in the suburbs was covered with snow, so that skiers, too, rejoiced. "Real winter at last!"

But Vadim gave little thought to either skating or skiing. All students tend to lose weight during the examination session, but Vadim lost so much that Krechetov asked him in alarm:

"How's your health, my boy? You haven't any of those spots on your lungs by any chance, have you? Everything all right?"

"Yes, I^{van} Antonovich, everything's all right."

Vadim did not move to the hostel, but he spent all his time there, working together with the other students and going home only to sleep. He got a "four" in Political Economy, and by the twenty-second of January the examination session was over—the hardest session Vadim had ever been through.

But he did not experience the usual joyous relief. Indeed, he felt more depressed than ever now that the work was over, and there was nothing to keep his mind off his troubles. The prospect of the winter holidays held no joy for him. On the contrary, he dreaded having the students go home and leave the hostel empty.

Vadim's friends, especially Lagodenko and Alexei Remeshkov, kept trying to persuade him to move to the hostel. They could not understand his refusal.

"What's the matter? Don't you like our kitchen? Or are you afraid our washbasin leaks?"

Vadim would search uncomfortably for excuses:

"I have to call up the hospital all the time, fellows. And you haven't got a—er—a telephone..."

"Er—a telephone!" mocked Lagodenko testily. "A fine excuse! It's only two minutes to the telephone downstairs, and there's one in the grocer's and on the corner. It's just that crazy bashfulness of yours, or your pride, or some other damn thing."

Vadim could not give a convincing excuse for not moving. Of course it was not because of the telephone. It seemed to him that if he moved to the hostel he would be farther away from his mother than ever, and that in some inexplicable way he would be betraying her. No doubt he would have felt better among his friends; he would have had less chance to think about her. But why should his suffering be alleviated when hers could not be? Yes, it was hard to remain in that empty room at night, alone with his thoughts. But these lonely, melancholy thoughts were essential to him. He vaguely felt that the harder it was for him, the easier it would be for her. Strange ideas came into his head, ideas which he could not express or explain to anyone.

There were nights when he did not sleep until dawn. He just lay there, his arm under his head, thinking and remembering. He often thought of his father, and the distant, half-forgotten years of his childhood.... How his father and he used to fly a kite in a vast meadow full of butterflies and grasshoppers, redolent with clover and daisies. His father had had a knack for making and flying kites, and Vadim used to draw funny faces on them. During summers in the country his father's pupils had often come to visit them—former pupils who were already grown-ups, as well as present pupils from the upper grades. His father had played *gorodki* with them and always won.

When his mother had her holidays in August, the family sometimes took a boat and rowed far up the river, spending the whole day there. Early in the morning the river was cool and still. The only people to be seen were occasional anglers in battered soft hats sitting on the

riverbank and casting hostile glances at the boat. As the day advanced it became hotter, pale clouds appeared in the sky, people dotted the riverbanks, boats appeared on the water. His father would land their boat on some sandy beach and they would bathe and bask in the sun and look for shells and "devil's-fingers" in the hot sand, and, if no one was near, his father would do tricks—stand on his head and walk on his hands right into the water.

That had been long ago—long, long ago. In his childhood Vadim wondered who lived in that house in the country now? Who ate on the verandah, with its coloured glass panes? Who bathed on that sandy beach? Perhaps the beach no longer existed—the level of the river had risen when the Moscow-Volga Canal was built, and the beach had probably been flooded.

Vadim recalled the stern, sad, intense look with which his father had said quietly: "Take care of your mother!" That too had been long ago, in a childhood which had come to an abrupt end on that hot and dusty July day. But how could he take care of her now? How? What could he do to save this life so dear to him? To preserve his vanishing childhood, his father, his father's memory?

Once more Vadim saw her beloved face, grey-eyed, wrinkled, no longer young. He remembered how he had stood at the front door in his uniform, in freshly-polished boots, and a trench cap, and with a suitcase in his hand. He had given a loud knock, and his heart had leaped to hear her soft voice say: "Just a minute!" She had opened the door—a small woman with grey hair, wearing an old green sweater—and started back, gasping softly, "Dimal!" Then she had collapsed in his arms, pressing her face to his rough, dusty uniform.

That, too, had been long ago—a joy of the distant past. He could not remember what they had said and done after the first wonderful moment of reunion. But he remembered how much excitement there had been in the

flat that day. All sorts of people had come to see them—old friends and new acquaintances. But now he was alone. All his friends were asleep. Perhaps, they had thought of him before falling asleep—cursed him for his stubbornness, or felt sorry for him. It was a wonderful thing to have friends. But friends were not enough.

Vera Fadeyevna had been in the diagnosis ward two weeks, but the doctors had not given a final diagnosis. They were still making tests, taking X-rays, holding consultations with big specialists. Vera Fadeyevna felt worse and worse. She kept losing weight and was exhausted by cough and fever.

Vadim had seen her only twice during that time, but he went to the hospital every day to read the notes the nurses brought him from her. They were short notes, written hurriedly on scraps of paper in an unrecognizable hand, so feeble that many of the words remained unfinished: "Dear boy. There's no noticeable change in my condit.... Feeling so-so.... How are your exams? I think of you all the time...."

Vadim sent her notes that were also short. Several times he tried to slip into the ward on non-visiting days. He was not admitted. He begged, pleaded, grew indignant, made a scene. One of the nurses called the head doctor—a little, irascible old man with a wizened pink face. He shouted at Vadim in a wheezy voice: "If you make any disturbance I'll forbid your coming here altogether! Al-to-gether, do you hear? Daria Ivanovna, Maria Ivanovna—remember my words! Al-to-gether!" and he rushed down the corridor, his white gown flying out behind him. Daria Ivanovna and Maria Ivanovna straightaway became deaf and dumb, so the argument was over.

One day Vadim met Valya in the hospital yard. While still some distance away he caught sight of her coming

toward him in a dark woollen cap and a long black coat beneath which he caught a glimpse of her white surgical gown. She was walking quickly, bent slightly forward, looking very businesslike. Knowing she was nearsighted, Vadim thought she would not see him. He refrained from calling her, feeling that he did not know her well enough.

But Valya saw him and called out gladly:

"Vadim! What are you doing here?"

He told her.

"You mean to say your mother's been here for two weeks and you haven't told me?" she exclaimed.

"I thought you knew," said Vadim. "Didn't Sergei tell you?"

Valya shook her head.

"I haven't seen him for a long time."

"He promised to tell you. Perhaps you could help me—give me some advice. I thought you weren't working here any more."

"I didn't know a thing about it," said Valya, shaking her head again and looking into Vadim's eyes. "You shouldn't have relied on him. You should have come to me yourself. Oh, well. . . . But how can I help you? What does Dr. Andreyev say?"

Vadim told her what Andreyev and other physicians had said, trying to recall the incomprehensible words he had heard them use, like: "An increase in the exudations of the pleura." When he finished, Valya explained that the doctors were probably afraid of tuberculosis, but since they had not discovered any symptoms of it, they would no doubt operate.

"Don't be afraid, Vadim," she comforted him. "Andreyev is a marvellous doctor—he works miracles."

"But after all—cancer. Cancer of the lungs," said Vadim disconsolately, glancing at Valya from under his brows. "I read up on it in a medical book. . . ."

"Well, and what did it say?"

"That cancer always had a 'lethal outcome,'" said Vadim with difficulty.

"Always lethal? That's not true!" denied Valya vehemently. "It doesn't have to end like that. Of course it's a very serious, dangerous disease, but we've had several cases of recovery in our clinic. It must have been an old book you read. Whose was it? Who wrote it?"

"I don't remember. But I don't think it was so old."

Valya took Vadim's arm, saying comfortingly:

"You mustn't worry so, Vadim. You must have hope that everything will turn out all right. I promise to visit your mother. Is she still in the diagnosis ward? I'll introduce you to the doctors. And I'll arrange to get you in to see her more often. And don't lose heart, promise me you won't."

"All right, Valya, I promise," murmured Vadim, not trusting his voice. He suddenly felt a rush of gratitude. This girl, whom he felt he had not really known before, inspired him with confidence. They parted good friends.

At last the holidays, joyless for Vadim, had arrived. His friends did indeed leave for various parts. A large group of Komsomol members, headed by Spartak, were going on a ski run through the Moscow Region, stopping at collective farms on the way. Professor Krylov, an expert skier, was going with them. Sergei, Galya, Marina and Lena went to a rest home.

Andrei came to see Vadim several times, and invited Vadim to visit him. "You'll get a sniff of snow and woods. That's just what you need—look at yourself! As green and skinny as a spring onion! Do come for a couple of days at least."

But Vadim couldn't leave Moscow even for two days. Every morning he went to the hospital, and every evening Valya phoned him from there.

One day Andrei said to him:

"Need any help with the housework? Any washing done, or anything like that? I'll tell my sister and she'll do it in no time."

"Nonsense!" said Vadim with a frown. "I can manage quite well by myself.... I don't need anybody's help."

"You don't?" said Andrei in some surprise. "I can imagine how you go messing about the house."

"First of all, I don't go messing about. I cook and wash and do everything else at least as well as your sister could. Besides, I hardly know her—I only saw her once, for about five minutes." Vadim shrugged his shoulders in astonishment. "You certainly do get funny ideas sometimes, Andrei!"

"You're the one who gets the funny ideas," retorted Andrei. "You ought to take things more simply, Dima. Without those foolish inhibitions handed down from the intelligentsia...."

"All right. Let's leave it at that."

"Let's not. I've told Olga all about you and your mother, and she's always at me for not calling you up or going to see you. I'm inclined to be a bit shy about such things myself. But Olga's different. She has a heart of gold, that girl. You have to be more straightforward with people; it's better to be, anyhow—it makes life easier."

"I quite agree. But I'll wash my own shirts," laughed Vadim.

On the eve of the ski run, Lagodenko dropped in to see Vadim, and a little later Andrei arrived. Everyone had just received stipends, and Lagodenko suggested buying food and wine and having a bachelor party. Ten minutes later the table was adorned by two bottles of red wine (Lagodenko was against vodka, since he had to be up and away at dawn the next morning); the room was filled with

the pungent odour of cheese and pickled cabbage, and Vadim was in the kitchen frying eggs.

Vadim was particularly grateful for his friends' visit tonight. He had returned from the hospital deeply depressed. The head doctor had told him they were almost certain Vera Fadeyevna had cancer of the lungs and intended operating next week.

"Too bad I won't be in Moscow! What a shame!" said Lagodenko, so truly distressed that one would have thought his presence in Moscow could influence the outcome of the operation. "See that the best doctor does the operation, Vadim. But you're no good at arranging things. I ought to attend to that myself."

"Don't worry, the best doctor is going to do it," said Vadim. "Doctor Andreyev."

"Good. When the time comes you'll have to take Vadim under your wing, Andrei. Make him keep his chin up. Those are the orders given by the whole crew."

As he spoke, Lagodenko uncorked the wine with a fork, dished out the fried eggs, and cut the cheese into thick slices.

"Since there are no ladies present, we can do what we please. And I please to eat cheese two inches thick. In order to get the feel of it. I always like things to be solid and weighty. You ought to have tasted the cheese they gave us in Bulgaria, fellows! In front of every house—a head of cheese and a glass of wine—a head of cheese and a glass of wine. Well, here goes!"

After his first glass of wine, Andrei grew unusually loquacious and philosophical. Leaning back in his chair and placing his huge hands on the table, he smiled pensively and said:

"Dima's having a hard time, and so are we, on his account. But it won't last. Everything'll come out all right and we'll all be happy again. It's got to be that way. We have a long, complicated life ahead of us—long and

complicated—and different for each of us. We'll each get our share of joy and sorrow. But what will be the main thing? Strange as it may seem, one of our modern poets puts it something like this," he paused for a moment and then began intoning in a long-drawn-out voice, with exaggerated pathos:

*No ranting grief, no histrionic passion,
Tempest-sweeping, leaving only tatters;
The daily woe, as constant as one's shadow—
That is the only thing that matters!*

"What's that?" asked Lagodenko, frowning. "The only thing that matters?"

"Later on he says you brew your song over the embers of your grief, to warm the hearts of others. As though grief and suffering were a source of courage and inspiration and made a person better. That's a false view when you come to think of it, and terribly old-fashioned. It sounds like Dostoyevsky who never was and never could be understood by the masses. The common people have expressed that same philosophy simpler and better: 'Every cloud has a silver lining.' That's the whole thing in a nutshell. But why glory in misfortune? It seems to me the only thing that counts is happiness—not grief. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do!" said Lagodenko, pouring out a second round.

"But not all kinds of happiness. Only the happiness that lures you ahead, draws you on, like a lodestar. The kind that's hard to reach, but *can* be reached, damn it all! The kind we dream about and think about and talk about with close friends. It's *happiness* that gives a man strength, and inspires him to feats of valour."

"Makarenko, it seems, called it 'tomorrow's happiness,'" said Vadim.

"I was just going to mention Makarenko,"* said Andrei. "What a man he was! How wonderfully he perceived the very essence of education! Remember how he said you had to help a person lay the rails for tomorrow's happiness? That was hitting the nail on the head, wasn't it? That's the key to communist education—teaching a person to believe in the reality of tomorrow's happiness—not a hereafter happiness, but a live, full-blooded, this-world happiness! A person armed with such a faith is all-powerful and unconquerable. By the way, I've decided to make Makarenko the subject of my paper for the S.R.S. It'll do me a lot of good too. His articles stand reading over and over again."

"Do you know what worries me sometimes?" said Vadim with a little laugh. "Makarenko once said that a good teacher should be a master of mimicry, that he ought to be able to be grim or affable as circumstances demand. In a word, he ought to be something of an actor, and I don't seem to have the slightest talent in that field."

Andrei nodded sympathetically:

"Just like me. I suppose we ought to join a dramatic circle. Too bad we're not like Sergei Palavin. There's an actor for you!"

"An actor? A pretender. A simulator," said Lagodenko testily. "That palaverer will never make a teacher. But apparently he doesn't want to—he plans to become an academician or a writer overnight. But never mind him! As for the acting, I have no fears for myself. I'm really not so bad at it."

He said this with such confidence, that Vadim couldn't help laughing.

"There's self-assurance for you! I envy you."

* A. S. Makarenko (1888-1919)—eminent Soviet educator and author of the well-known book, *Road to Life (An Epic of Education)*.—Tr.

"Why not?" Lagodenko got up and began pacing the floor. "I don't think anybody ever chose his profession with more confidence than I did. And that's not hard to understand. I got pushed and battered around in my childhood more than most people. Until I was twelve years old I roamed the streets with no father or mother to look after me. Then I landed in a Children's Home near Rostov. The Principal was a man named Artem Ilyich. What a man!" Lagodenko sighed, shook his head, and repeated softly and almost tenderly: "What a man! He was a teacher in every sense of the word. If I should hear that anyone had done him a wrong, I'd rush to his defence this very day. I'd even risk my life for him, as sure as my name's Lagodenko. He's Principal of a school in Krasnovodsk now. And all the other fellows from the school feel the same about him. I corresponded with him all through the war." After a short pause, Lagodenko said, knitting his black bushy eyebrows: "That's the kind of Principal I'd like to be."

As Vadim listened to Lagodenko, he could not help comparing this Artem Ilyich with his father, and it seemed to him the two men must have had much in common. His father's pupils had been just as fond of him, though he never made any effort to win their affection; Vadim even remembered his laughing at those teachers in his school who "solicited" the love of the children, straining every nerve to become "the favourite teacher." His father had been stern and exacting, incapable of cajoling anyone. Wherein lay his strength? Wherein lay the strength and charm of such people as Lagodenko's Artem Ilyich and Makarenko?

After brief consideration, Vadim answered his own question out loud:

"The most important thing is to have faith in people. The Gorky principle: to respect a person thoroughly and demand the best of him. That's the most important thing."

"You're right," said Lagodenko. "To approach each

person from an optimistic premise—that's the way Makarenko put it, and very well, I think. You have to be a real person yourself, too. As for me. . ."

"As for me, I have no fears for myself," Andrei put in with a wink.

"Wait a minute," laughed Lagodenko. "Now that we're on this serious subject, what I wanted to say was—as for me, I have no use for teachers like that Kamkova. In everyday life she's a dry pedant, a Kozelsky in petticoats. She walks through life with a red pencil in her hand. I once attended a seminar she held with freshmen. You can't imagine anything so dry and boring. That icy gaze! That didactic tone! She all but insisted on their folding their hands and not turning their heads. But the fact is, it's a devilishly hard job we've chosen!" Lagodenko sighed deeply and rubbed his hands together. "And who knows which of us will prove equal to it? Only time will tell. There's no point in guessing at present."

Just the same they did try to peer a little into their future. Lagodenko wanted to get a job in some coastal town where he could catch a glimpse of the sea from the school windows; Andrei dreamed of teaching in a rural school in the Siberian taiga, or in the Altai. Vadim gave preference to a small town on the bank of a river, a town all green and leafy, with trees in the schoolyard too—old apple trees and acacias—and a pine wood not far away, and a lake where he could fly kites and go fishing with the boys in the summer, skating in the winter. Inexpressibly distant seemed this life, though actually they were standing on its very threshold. Their conceptions of what it would be like were still hazy; they knew only one thing for certain—that they were eager to embark upon it.

Late that evening Raya phoned and warned Lagodenko that if he didn't come home immediately, he would never be able to get up in time to catch the morning train. Andrei remained to spend the night with Vadim.

Vadim slept calmly and peacefully that night for the first time in a month. Somehow he felt confident that his mother's operation would be a success and she would recover. Everything would turn out all right. It should be so. It would be so.

A week later the operation was performed. And it did, indeed, have unexpectedly good results. Dr. Andreyev emerged from the operating room looking pale and exhausted, but relieved. Valya immediately rushed up to him.

"Sergei Konstantinovich? Well?..."

Vadim was unable to rise from the sofa where he was sitting. He could only clench his fists and stare at the doctor's tired, perspiring face.

"Everything's all right, comrades," said Andreyev, gazing at Vadim. A group of white-garbed doctors surrounded the surgeon, who stopped to speak to them, addressing most of his remarks to an old man with a wizened pink face.

"Fortunately our fears proved groundless. The swelling in the lungs was not cancer, but echinococcus."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed one of the doctors.

"Oh no!" interrupted another excitedly. "You based your opinion on the Lalayants case, whereas *our* case..."

The doctors began an incomprehensible medical discussion, causing Vadim to wince every time they referred to "*our* case." Presently, Valya came up to him.

"Oh, Dima!" she said, clasping his hand. "See how splendidly everything has turned out? How happy I am for you! In two or three weeks your mother will be well enough to be sent to a sanatorium. And in two months she'll be back at work."

Vadim was unable to utter a word. He just sat there nodding his head and gazing into her shining eyes.

Chapter 19

The skiing party returned to the Institute in the middle of February, refreshed and vigorous, tanned by sun and wind, and feeling very superior to students who had spent their holidays in Moscow.

For some time the ski run was the sole topic of conversation at the hostel and in the corridors of the Institute.

Detailed accounts were given of how Spartak Galustyan had presented books to the library of the kolkhoz over which the Institute had assumed patronage; of how Max Vilkin had organized a chess tournament in the kolkhoz club, and been beaten by a fifth-grade boy; of how the students had participated in a district ski race, in which Lagodenko had come in first, though he had broken his skis at the finish; of how Professor Krylov had taught Nina Fokina to ski-jump; of how Max Vilkin had lost his glasses, thereby becoming transformed into such an Adonis that all the girls had fallen in love with him, and he had decided to stop wearing glasses and grow a beard so as to become utterly irresistible; and so on, and so forth.

For Vadim, the first days of the new term were happy ones, marked by a return to work and the society of the friends he had missed so sorely. He felt as if he had just come through a serious illness himself, and was experiencing the joy of a return to life—to his home, to his beloved books, to the snow-covered streets beneath the February sky so blue above them.

A few days after studies were resumed, Kozelsky met him in the corridor and asked how his paper was getting on.

Vadim said he had been working hard of late, but even so would not be ready very soon.

Kozelsky displayed extraordinary interest and concern

as he inquired into the plan of the work and the references used, suggesting several books Vadim had not known about. They spent the entire interval walking up and down the corridor discussing the paper.

When at last the bell rang, Kozelsky suddenly said:

"Oh, yes—I was going through my library the other day and I happened to come upon an excellent monograph on Lermontov. It came out in the beginning of the century. You might be able to use it; would you like to see it?"

"I'd be only too glad," said Vadim, more and more perplexed by Kozelsky's solicitude.

"Then write down my address and drop in for the book on Sunday, around two or three o'clock. Will that suit you? Very well: apartment 2, 38 Pechatnikov Street—near Sretenskiye Gate."

Vadim made a note of the address.

"I'll be expecting you."

"Thank you, Boris Matveyevich. I'll be sure to come."

The book certainly might come in handy, thought Vadim to himself. And there could be no harm in taking it from Kozelsky. But why was the professor so obliging all of a sudden? Perhaps he had something up his sleeve. Could it be that he had heard of Vadim's intention to criticize his work at the Council of Studies and was trying to win him over?

On Sunday Vadim set out for Pechatnikov Street. When he was changing buses in the centre of town, he caught sight of Sergei strolling toward the bus stop, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his loose, shaggy coat.

"Hi, there!" called Vadim. "Where are you off to?"

"Ah, Dima!" replied Sergei with a smile. "I'm taking the Number 2 Bus."

"So am I."

"Splendid! We'll go together. You know me—" Sergei pulled a little leather-bound book out of his pocket and cov-

ered his mouth with it as he yawned. "I haunt the book-sellers' Sunday mornings—found this quaint little thing on Arbat Street. It's about the French ballet in the 17th century. Very rare."

"What do you want with it?" asked Vadim in surprise.

"Oh, it's not for me. Someone asked me to find it for him."

They got on the bus together. As they rode along, Sergei talked about his connections with Moscow secondhand booksellers, boasting that they would find him any book he wanted in two days' time. He himself, of course, had often been of use to them. At Sretenskiye Gate he got up.

"Well, so long! I'm getting off here."

"So am I," said Vadim.

"You too? Splendid!"

They went as far as Pechatnikov Street together, and the thought struck Vadim that they must be going to the same address.

"Don't tell me you're going to 38 Pechatnikov Street?" said Vadim with a smile.

"Why, is that where *you're* going?" asked Sergei in surprise, trying to hide a certain embarrassment by laughing. "To see Boris Matveyevich? What a coincidence!" Suddenly he grew serious. "Just paying him a visit, or what?"

"To get a book. He offered me a book for my paper."

"Oh." Sergei gave a little sigh and adopted a tone of easy familiarity, as though trying to justify himself in Vadim's eyes. "Boris isn't such a bad sort after all, between you and me. He really isn't!"

He stepped inside the entranceway and walked straight to the door of the flat. Casually ringing the bell with the knuckle of his third finger, he managed to give Vadim the following information before the door was opened:

"The flat belongs to his married sister—he just has

a room here. He's a bachelor—has nobody but himself to worry about. A soft life. You'll see the atmosphere. . . ."

The door was opened to them by a lanky, fair-haired youth with a bored look on his face, wearing a checked sports shirt and sports trousers.

"Hullo, Kostya!" said Sergei brightly.

"Greetings!" replied the youth, turning his head to call out:

"Boris! Somebody to see you!"

He disappeared, whistling, behind a door.

"That's his nephew. He has two," whispered Sergei. "They're both students of the Road-Building Institute. Motorbike fiends. Not on very good terms with their uncle. . . ."

He was interrupted by the appearance of Kozelsky himself in a gaudy dressing gown and slippers, a newspaper in his hand.

"Hullo, young people! Did you come together?" he said, nodding and smiling cordially. "Well, Sergei, did you find what I asked you to?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well done! Come along in here."

Vadim followed Sergei into Kozelsky's room. It was large, with a high, ornamented ceiling and two windows over which the curtains were half drawn. A bronze lamp was lighted on the desk, for the day was grey and wintry, and twilight came early.

"I can only stay a minute, Boris Matveyevich," said Sergei, sitting down on the edge of the sofa. "But I found it all right. And where do you think? On Arbat Street, in Pavel Ivanovich's shop." He gave a chuckle of satisfaction as he handed Kozelsky the leather-bound volume. "He kept it for me six days. There was a Leningrad collector after it—an actor—who offered him some fantastic exchange—the complete works of Maupassant, or something like that—what d'you think of that?"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Kozelsky. "How shall I ever thank you, Sergei? You're a marvell!"

He began to turn over the pages eagerly, smiling and nodding, and reading snatches of the French text under his breath. He took it over to the lamp to make a more thorough examination, turning the book over and over in his hands, stroking the gilt edges, wetting his finger and carefully rubbing something off the binding.

"This is a treasure—absolutely unique!" he exclaimed at last, raising a beaming face to Vadim. "I've been hunting for this book for years! It's about the poet and choreographer, Rinuccini. Louis XIII himself danced in his ballets. He was a famous Italian poet, the one who introduced the recitative—or rather, who revived the classical Greek recitative. Ottavio Rinuccini!"

"Are you interested in the ballet?" asked Vadim, feeling obliged to say something in response to such ecstasy.

"I am not only interested—I collect books on the ballet. I don't know how I can ever thank you, Sergei, you're a wonder!" Sergei, proud and flattered, half rose from the sofa as Kozelsky pressed his hand gratefully.

Having put his treasure in the bookcase, the professor placed a pack of expensive cigarettes on the table. He must have specially bought it for the occasion, for the pack had not been opened.

"Well, young people, have a smoke and tell me what's on your mind."

"Excuse me, Boris Matveyevich, but I must go," said Sergei, taking a cigarette and getting up. "I have a date at the Timiryazev monument in half an hour."

"Oh, that being the case, we can't hope to keep you," said Kozelsky with a significant wink at Vadim. "Come along, I'll see you to the door. By the way, are you aware that the meeting of the Council of Studies is to be held the day after tomorrow?"

"Can't you forget work even on Sundays?" laughed Sergei, obviously evasive. "Well, good-bye, Dima!"

They went out of the room. Vadim heard them talking in the hall—Kozelsky's soft, even tones, Sergei's deep exclamations accompanied by little bursts of laughter. Vadim distinctly heard Sergei say: "But why can't you?" and this was followed by a lengthy explanation from Kozelsky, spoken in an even lower voice.

Meanwhile, Vadim examined the professor's room. Everything in it spoke of a tranquil, comfortable, bachelor life. The room was study, drawing room, library, and bedroom in one. The entire floor was covered by a thick Persian carpet. The handsome old writing table, the armchairs, and the bookcases were all of mahogany. A television set on a low table. An electric heater. A tennis racket in a press. Two light, three-kilogram dumbbells on the window sill, and next to them a long-necked bottle of brandy. And a pier glass—a flawless, shining pier glass between the windows. The dainty, voluptuous oval seemed to have found its way from some lady's boudoir into the bachelor quarters of this scholar and sportsman.

"I am not going to stay long either," decided Vadim. "I'll just take the book and leave." He felt ill at ease, largely because he suspected Kozelsky of having had some ulterior motive for inviting him here. But what could it be? Vadim was baffled by this question, and annoyed with himself for having come. He felt there was something false and offensive in Kozelsky's show of good will and hospitality. And he was upset at having met Sergei here (although Sergei had seemed even more upset). Why should Vadim accept favours from Kozelsky? He could just as easily have got the book from the library.

The voices of Kozelsky and Sergei could still be heard out in the hall. Vadim's annoyance grew. He began to pace the floor, stepping heavily so as to be heard. He went over to the table and began to look through a book on

architecture lying on top of some others. Suddenly he came upon a picture of a colonnaded palace that seemed familiar to him. Somewhere he had seen those columns, the equestrian statues, the pathways encircling the fountain. . . . What was this building? The picture had no inscription—only a plate number.

Kozelsky entered the room.

"Well, well!" he said briskly. "That Sergei of yours does like to talk! What's that you're looking at? Ah, 19th-century architecture!"

"I've seen this building somewhere," said Vadim, "but I can't remember where."

"Oh, that!" Kozelsky leaned over the book and gave a short laugh. "You can hardly have seen that building, my boy. That's the Parliament in Vienna. A splendid affair in the neo-Greek style. And this is known as the fountain of Minerva."

"The Parliament building in Vienna?" exclaimed Vadim. "Of course. Now it all comes back to me. Those stairs, that fountain. . . ."

"Have you been in Vienna?" asked Kozelsky in some surprise.

"Yes. We took that very building. We stormed the entrance from this street over here, while the fascists shot at our tanks from a big house over here—it's not in the picture. And here's where the big fighting began."

Kozelsky stopped smiling and began to listen with exaggerated attention, exclaiming and shaking his head sympathetically as he said: "Indeed! . . . You don't say! . . . Dear me!"

"Have you ever been in Vienna?" asked Vadim.

"Me? Alas, I haven't," he said with a sigh, giving Vadim a quick glance. "In fact, I have never had the opportunity to go abroad at all." He narrowed his eyes as he recalled something. "Except to Finland. Some thirty years ago. But that's hardly abroad."

Vadim was about to remind Kozelsky of the book, but the professor himself went to the bookcase, raised the glass panel over the top shelf, and took out a large volume carefully wrapped in newspaper.

"Here's your book," he said, holding it out. "You can keep it as long as you like."

Vadim thanked him. He had lost all interest in the book and would gladly have refused it, but he lacked the courage. He wanted to say good-bye and leave that very minute, but again he lacked the courage. So he took the book and began looking through it. He couldn't think of a thing to say except "thank you," and a strained, foolish silence ensued, which was beginning to grow on Vadim's nerves. Apparently he looked miserable, for Kozelsky said:

"What's the matter, have you got toothache?"

For some reason Vadim said "yes." Perhaps he thought it would be a good excuse to get away. Kozelsky, who was now sitting in a chair by the table and smoking his pipe, was making commentaries on Pechorin, Ibsen, and Byron's *Don Juan* in his usual stilted manner.

"I suppose you know that on Tuesday Sergei's fate is to be decided?" he said suddenly.

"No, I didn't. Why on Tuesday?"

"There's to be a meeting of the Council of Studies in connection with the end of the examination session. At the same time the question of scholarships is to be decided. I think Sergei has a very good chance of getting one, don't you? He has 'fives' in all his subjects—that silly business about Ryleyev doesn't count; I have already given him another examination. And his paper was outstanding."

It struck Vadim that Kozelsky was sponsoring Sergei's candidacy, and wanted Vadim to know it. Why? Probably to make Vadim see him in the light of his friend's patron. Apparently he knew that Vadim and Sergei had been friends since childhood. But Vadim, who was thoroughly

annoyed with Kozelsky by this time, decided he had had enough of being polite.

"Sergei isn't the one who should get it, Boris Matveyevich," he said. "Andrei Sirikh deserves it more."

"Really?" said Kozelsky in surprise. "I hardly think...."

"I'm certain of it," said Vadim stubbornly.

"I don't know about that. Oh, of course Sirikh has every right to compete. His paper on Gorky was very good. See how important it is to finish your paper in time, young man?" said Kozelsky with a lift of his brows.

Vadim frowned.

"I'm not writing my paper just for the sake of a scholarship, Boris Matveyevich."

"Of course not; I understand that," nodded Kozelsky. "But you must realize that any prize, any high award, is bestowed as a result of stiff competition. The present case is no exception, though the competition was carried on without any open declaration. Isn't that true? And it seems to me"—here Kozelsky gave a gentle smile—"it seems to me that your righteous indignation at my insinuation was hardly called for—was, in fact, rather naive. Isn't that so? Don't you agree?"

The thinly disguised mockery in his tone gave Vadim back his self-confidence. Now things were clear. The vagueness was gone. This was the old Kozelsky talking, and Vadim had only one attitude toward him.

"No, I don't, Boris Matveyevich," he said, also attempting a polite smile. "I dislike competitions in which the participants curry favour with the judges."

"Quite right," said Kozelsky seriously. "That always makes a bad impression."

He rounded his lips and blew a smoke ring that slowly floated ceilingward, expanding and fading into the air. He followed it with his eyes until it vanished, then blew another. Vadim could see that the decisive moment

had come; Kozelsky was turning over in his mind just how to broach the subject he had invited Vadim here to discuss.

Suddenly the professor glanced at Vadim, and said in a particularly light and cheerful tone:

"Well, my boy, and how are you preparing for the meeting of the Council of Studies? Perhaps I can help you in some way?"

So here it was. Vadim had indeed begun preparations for his report on Kozelsky's work. He had taken all Nina Fokina's lecture-notes, made a careful study of them, and drawn conclusions. On Monday he was going to the Party Committee to ask the advice of Krylov. The question of Kozelsky would, of course, be raised at another meeting of the Council of Studies—to take place two weeks hence, towards the end of February. . . . But Boris Matveyevich was as resolute as he was cunning. He was not leaving anything to chance.

"I'm not ready yet, Boris Matveyevich," said Vadim coldly. "I don't intend to speak at the next meeting of the Council of Studies, but at the one after."

"Oh, I thought it was the next one," said Kozelsky, cocking his head in surprise. "Well, how is your work progressing? Meeting with any difficulties?"

"Nothing of any importance, thank you."

"Very glad to hear it. Quite sure you can manage without my help?"

Vadim was somewhat disconcerted by the unusualness of the conversation. For a moment they studied each other in silence—Kozelsky with mocking condescension in his narrowed eyes, Vadim with a calmness it cost him much effort to maintain. At last Vadim dropped his eyes and murmured ungraciously:

"I'll manage by myself somehow."

Kozelsky gave a loud laugh.

"Really? Come now, do let me help you. Have you seen my book on Dostoyevsky that's just come out?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, you'll be glad to know that a review of it has already appeared. You might find it of use. The critic is very crushing. You'll find it in *Izvestia* of January 30. Make a note of it, or you may forget."

"Just a second," said Vadim, taking out his notebook. He was determined to play the game to a finish. "You say *Izvestia* of the 30th?"

"Uh-huh," nodded Kozelsky, his mouth full of smoke which he again sent up in a ring. "Two columns on the third page."

Vadim wrote this down and returned the book to his pocket.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" asked Kozelsky suddenly.

"No, thank you, Boris Matveyevich. I must be going."

"Perhaps coffee and brandy? Or simply brandy?"

"No, thank you, Boris Matveyevich."

Vadim realized that Kozelsky had had enough of this talk, and of his presence. The professor had not accomplished what he had hoped to. And what had that been? Apparently to have a heart-to-heart talk with Vadim, in which he would justify himself and prove that he was right, stunning Vadim with the weight of his erudition. But he had found it beneath his dignity to begin such a conversation, and Vadim had evaded it. Or had he wanted to cajole Vadim? To probe him? To soften his heart? To dazzle him with his fine style? Who could tell? One thing was certain—Kozelsky's position must be shaky indeed if he could stoop to such measures.

Meanwhile Kozelsky poured himself out a tumbler of brandy and, nodding slightly to Vadim, gulped it down. A momentary glitter came to his eyes, and he smiled.

"Too bad you won't have any—it's not bad brandy. Incidentally, it's good for toothache."

"Thank you, I never drink brandy," said Vadim, getting up. "Good-bye, Boris Matveyevich."

"Good-bye, my boy," replied Kozelsky in a loud voice, inclining his head. "I appreciate your coming to see an old man. Well, good-bye."

He saw Vadim to the door. His face had resumed its usual expression of cold, haughty indifference, but his voice retained its gentle tone.

"Drop in again some time. Sergei comes to play mahjong. I don't suppose you play mahjong. We'll teach you. It's an amusing combination of dominoes and poker. Do you play poker?"

"I play mahjong, Boris Matveyevich."

"Oh, you do, do you?" Again there was surprise in his voice. "It's a game that's not very well known here. But millions of people play it in China and the Orient."

"I know," said Vadim. "I played it with the Chinese. I'm the one who brought Sergei the game from Mukden. He wrote and asked me for a set. But I don't like it. I find it a bit boring."

"Really? Well, anyway—drop in."

"Thank you! Good-bye," said Vadim, taking Kozelsky's outstretched hand. Then he turned and went out, surreptitiously leaving the book on a trunk near the coat-rack.

Kozelsky closed the door, picked up the "forgotten" volume and went back to his room, where he removed the newspaper covering and returned the book to its shelf. He poured himself out another glass of brandy and drank it down. Then he began to pace the floor, his face growing ever more glum.

"What am I to do?" he said to himself, halting uncertainly. "Shall I go and speak to Miron?"

At that moment the door opened and Kostya's fair head appeared in the opening.

"How about a game of mahjong, Boris?"

"What?" asked Kozelsky, turning sharply. "In the first place, be so good as to knock before opening the door."

"All right, all right," nodded Kostya placatingly. "But how about some mahjong?"

After a moment's pause, Kozelsky shouted in a shrill, strident voice:

"Damn mahjong! Leave me in peace! Only a dunce could get any pleasure out of that—that—"

"Phe-e-e-w!" whistled Kostya, slowly closing the door.

Vadim went striding down the street, happy to be out in the fresh air, glad that his hands were empty and he could swing them freely. As he marched along, he smiled to himself as he remembered snatches of his conversation with Kozelsky, and even repeated certain things out loud, for the sheer pleasure of it. "I'll manage alone somehow, Boris Matveyevich..." "No, thanks, I never drink brandy."

On the whole, he was pleased with the way he had handled the situation.

Chapter 20

After they were married, Lagodenko and Raya were given a room to themselves on the first floor of the hostel. Never in his life had Lagodenko received guests, but now guests were frequent. Raya would make tea on the electric stove, and treat her guests to biscuits. But more often he and Raya went upstairs to join the other students. In the evenings they longed to hear Marina's infectious laugh, Max's weighty observations, Alexei's witty remarks—to take part in the fun and arguments that always lasted far into the night.

One evening Lagodenko entered the boys' room in a grave and anxious mood.

He was met by the usual noise and bustle and smoke-filled air. Rashid, who was going to the theatre, was sitting on the edge of a chair shaving himself, squinting into a tiny pocket mirror that showed half a lathered cheek and the tip of an ear. From one corner came the voice of Sasha Salazkin, a student of mathematics who had moved into the room when Lagodenko moved out. He was telling a funny story to which no one was listening. Alexei, who had succeeded to Lagodenko's position of monitor, was abusing Max for sharpening a pencil over the floor. He was about to throw the pencil out of the window, but, suddenly softening, tossed it on to Max's bed instead.

"If I catch you at it again, I'll make you sweep up the shavings with your own beard!" he said fiercely, adding, as he caught sight of Lagodenko, "That predecessor of mine let you do whatever you liked! But I'll make you toe the mark all right, you lazy good-for-nothings!"

"Cut it out, Alexei," said Lagodenko, taking a chair in the middle of the room. "And you shut up for a minute, Sasha. There's a matter demanding attention. Hark ye! Hark ye! Today I met Kozelsky in the yard. As you know, he and I are such bosom friends that there was a time when we didn't even speak to each other. He comes up to me and says, 'How do you do, Comrade Lagodenko! May I have a word with you?' How do you like that? The professor was not looking himself at all. . . ."

At that moment the door burst open and in flew Lusya Voronkova.

"Hullo again! May I come in?"

"No, you may not. I'm dressing," said Alexei sternly, removing his coat.

"None of your nonsense, Alexei. Just wait till you hear my news!" With a gay little laugh, Lusya sat down on somebody's cot. "The Council of Studies ended only half an hour ago, and you should have heard how they gave it to Kozelsky!"

"At last!" said Lagodenko.

"It turns out that his students made the poorest showing of all in the exams. And oh, how they lammed into Boris Matveyevich! Krylov spoke against him, and Ivan Antonovich, and simply everyone! Accused him of being a formalist, and of not being—what do you call it?" Lusya was so excited that she couldn't find words to express herself. "Contemporary—contemporary in his views. Krylov said he dissects literary characters, as if they were corpses. You should have seen Kozelsky—he was simply green! Then he took the floor. He promised to reform, to drop his formalistic methods; he tore his hair and beat his breast. We could hardly believe our ears."

"Who's 'we'?" asked Lagodenko scathingly. "I suppose you made a speech at the Council too? Or were you hiding under the table?"

"No, I wasn't. I wasn't even there, but I was just as surprised as everybody else," replied Lusya imperturbably. "Besides, they announced the scholarship award, and who do you think got it? Sergei Palavin!"

"That's too bad," said Alexei. "Andrei should have got it."

"Oh no he shouldn't!" protested Lusya. "Sergei's an outstanding student; they were right to give it to him."

"What makes him so outstanding?" asked Lagodenko with a snort.

"His marks, and his talent, and his knowledge, and in general. . ."

"It's all because of that paper he wrote," said Max. "If it hadn't been for that, he never would have got it."

"Well, at least he was awarded the scholarship on his own merits. Everyone says his paper was head and shoulders above. . ."

"Tripel!" said Lagodenko with a deprecatory wave of his hand. "Andrei should have got it. Ivan Antonovich has no backbone—he can't put up a fight."

"He didn't even attempt to," laughed Lusya. "You're terribly partial, Pyotr! Everybody knows that. Andrei isn't. He himself said that Sergei was the cleverest of us all, and the one most deserving of the scholarship."

"Did he say that? He's a jellyfish; a Tolstoyan. He's got an inferiority complex you could—" Lagodenko fairly spat in his disgust. "A fine person you found to quote!"

"Well, I've done my duty; I've told you all the news, and you can take it or leave it," said Lusya, getting up. "Now I'll go back to the girls. Wishing you healthy, wealthy, and wise. Oh, by the way, have you finished with the broom?"

"Yes," said the monitor, and Lusya disappeared with the broom.

"Riding a broom's just her style," muttered Sasha from his corner.

For some minutes Lagodenko sat staring silently in front of him, tapping the seat of his chair; at last, with a sigh, he resumed his story about Kozelsky:

"Well, listen, fellows; where was I? Ah, about meeting Kozelsky in such a strange mood. Well—" Again Lagodenko fell silent, then suddenly brought his fist down on his knee: "Damn it all! That little chatterbox has scattered all my hopes! I did think they'd put Palaverer in his place! Oh, well. . . . What was I saying? That's right, I met him and he told me he was having some trouble at the University—had made some mistakes and was leaving the place. The same sort of mistakes we criticized him for here. I couldn't imagine why he should be telling me all this. He went on to say that of course his standards were too high and he had stressed the wrong things. But he saw all that now, and was convinced our differences were sound, healthy differences, bringing benefit to both sides. Surely they couldn't estrange us in matters of principle."

"That's interesting," said Max, edging closer.

"He said he respected me and my comrades as much

as ever and considered us his friends; and if now, when he was having trouble at the University, we would write him a recommendation—just a few honest words about his work, his lectures and the S.R.S.—it might make all the difference. He said we knew him better than the students at the University because he had worked at our Institute longer. I said: 'I thought you were leaving the University of your own accord?' He said, of course he was, but if we and some other leading students wrote such a recommendation, he might not have to. It all depended on the circumstances. He said they accused him there of kowtowing to bourgeois culture. Had we ever detected such a thing? And off he went—quoted from his lectures, from all sorts of speeches and articles—he even reminded me of things he had said during conversations in the corridor. He looked so scared and bewildered—it was a rotten thing to happen!" Lagodenko briskly scratched the back of his neck and shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't know what to do or say. I swear I couldn't help feeling sorry for him!"

For a second he gazed blankly at his listeners without speaking, then suddenly frowned and said:

"There's a situation for you! What are we going to do about it?"

"Why should he have come to you?" asked Max. "There was never much love lost between you two."

"I asked him that myself. He said our differences had only concerned literature and were perfectly legitimate. But now he was approaching me as a comrade whom he respected. . . ."

"Humph! A comrade!" scoffed Alexei. "Just a clever manoeuvre."

"Why should you say that?" asked Lagodenko. "I quite understand why he behaved as he did. Why shouldn't he respect me, despite our differences? He has every reason to."

"But have you every reason to respect him?" asked Max.

"Me? Well. . . ." Lagodenko sighed and seemed to be lost in thought. At last he said, very gravely:

"I can't help feeling sorry for him; after all, he's a human being—and an old professor. I feel sorry for him."

"Well, you shouldn't," said Max. "You mustn't defend him. You have to stand up for your principles. You yourself came out against him at the meeting; he fought back tooth and nail, and some took his side. We opposed them all. And now you want to smooth everything over with a sentimental recommendation? Can't you see how wrong that would be?"

"Yes, it would!" agreed Alexei. "You've got to be consistent."

"A fine lot you are," suddenly put in Sasha, who did not even know who Kozelsky was, but wanted to support Lagodenko. "Hitting a fellow when he's down!"

"Less noise, mathematician! And don't poke your nose into things you know nothing about!" said Max.

For a while Lagodenko sat chewing the end of his cigarette without saying a word. Presently he sat bolt upright and said stubbornly:

"Well, say what you like, I feel sorry for him. And I can't refuse help when I'm asked for it. I'm a sailor, understand? And I don't strike a fellow when he's down."

"You needn't shout."

"I'm not shouting. I'm just saying you're a hardhearted lot," retorted Lagodenko, definitely raising his voice. "Yes you are—you've lost any feeling you ever had. I can't be like that: I've got to let bygones be bygones. After all, he's not an enemy. And since he's asked me for help—well, I'm a sailor. . . ."

"You're no sailor; you're a jellyfish!" cried the flushed Max, as he turned and left the room.

Miron Mikhailovich Sizov, Dean of the Literature Department, received visitors after three o'clock in the afternoon. But he would see the visitor he was now awaiting at any time—before, during, or after receiving hours. He was not anticipating a pleasant talk with him. But the interview was as essential as it was inevitable.

Sizov had known this man for more than forty years, but he could not say that they were friends. Friendship is least of all a matter of years. Fate had simply thrown them together from time to time throughout this long period. They had been born in the same town in the south of Russia. Sizov was the son of a bookbinder; the other, the son of a lawyer who had moved to this small town from St. Petersburg. The boys went to the same school, and the year before the outbreak of World War I they had gone together to St. Petersburg to enter the University.

At first they continued to be friends, and even lived together. But soon Sizov's friend, who got a good allowance from home, went to live with relatives, and Sizov was left to eke out a meagre existence by tutoring or doing any odd job that came his way.

In the autumn of 1914 an incident occurred which caused the two boys to take utterly different paths. One of the professors at the University was expelled for holding progressive views. A group of revolutionary-minded students held a demonstration in protest, and all of these students were likewise expelled, with the exception of one who managed to reinstate himself with the authorities by repenting of his "crime." This exception happened to be Sizov's schoolmate.

As soon as Sizov was expelled he was drafted into the army and found himself on the Austrian front. The revolution broke out and he returned to Petrograd a member of the Social-Democratic Labour Party and a soldiers' deputy. Again these two met, this time quite by chance at a street meeting held in the seething, simmering Petrograd of the

first weeks following the revolution. Neither of them bothered to recall the past—they had more important things to think of. Sizov's friend had already graduated from the University and was now working in the editorial offices of the Granat Encyclopedia. He complained to Sizov that he was miserable at his work, that "in such soul-stirring times he wanted to be in the thick of things, doing a vital job," and asked Sizov to help him obtain work in the Commissariat of People's Education. But Sizov left for the front before he had a chance to do anything for him.

The Civil War then raging in the country tossed him from one end of the land to another. He was commissar of a division on the Kolchak front, fought in the Caucasus, and helped to rout Wrangel.

The year of 1921 found both these men once more in their native town. Sizov had returned on a visit before leaving for Moscow to study in the newly-founded Institute of Red Professors. His old friend was working for the local Department of People's Education. This meeting in their native town, among old friends and old places, bringing back memories of childhood and youth, seemed to draw them together again. Sizov even regretted having to leave for Moscow so soon.

In the middle of the 'twenties, his friend, too, arrived in Moscow. At first he worked in various publishing houses, but soon began to teach literature and write literary criticism. He wrote a book, was awarded scientific degrees and became something of a figure in the literary world. Sizov was made director of an Institute in Central Asia, where he lived for some years. When he returned to Moscow, his old friend had become almost a celebrity. He lectured in several institutes, was on the editorial boards of various magazines and publishing houses; he was a member of jubilee committees, gave public lectures, and his name, preceded by an imposing "Prof.," frequently appeared in newspapers and on lecture bills. Once more the

two men were separated by war, this time World War II. Sizov joined the People's Militia and spent four years at the front; the famous professor became Head of the Literature Chair at a university in a Volga town.

For the last three years they had been working together, but found neither time nor inclination for reminiscences. They met only at the Institute. Their relations were purely formal, and it is doubtful whether anyone in the Institute knew that the Dean of the Literature Department and the Professor of Russian Literature had once been schoolmates.

But now that the professor was in need of help, it was highly probable that he would call on Sizov at the latter's home. He would begin the visit by recalling their early friendship—their school days, and the life in St. Petersburg. Then he would say that no one knew him so well as Miron Sizov, his boyhood chum. But did Miron Sizov really know him—this distinguished-looking, grey-haired professor, with his proud carriage and the flush of old age on his flaccid cheeks? No, he had known a close-cropped little boy in a blue school uniform with shiny buttons, and he had known something of the tall, thin student in pince-nez, and he had had slight acquaintance with a young man in a well-pressed khaki uniform, smart riding boots, and leather cap. . . .

But this professor? Miron Sizov, his old school chum, seemed to know less of him than the students did. How they had attacked him at the Komsomol meeting, when the case of that blustering sailor, Lagodenko, had been brought up!

... It was getting late. Receiving hours had long been over. His visitor had not come today either, though the order for his discharge was lying on Sizov's desk, waiting to be signed. The Dean reached for the bell to summon his secretary, but at that moment she entered the office.

"Professor Kozelsky to see you, Miron Mikhailovich."

"Ask him to come in," said Sizov, getting up.

Kozelsky entered. He had grown older and thinner during the past few days, but he was as immaculately groomed as ever. Silently extending a cold hand to Sizov, he sank into an armchair in front of the desk.

"I know it's too late to do anything about it, and I purposely delayed coming," he said with a short laugh, his voice trembling slightly. "But I hope—have you a few minutes to spare?"

"I've been expecting you."

Kozelsky nodded appreciatively and took his pipe out of his breast pocket. His movements were very deliberate as he filled it, but he could not stop the shaking of his hand, which sent the tobacco spilling on the floor, filling the room with a peculiar honeylike fragrance. At last he lighted up.

"There's one thing I *would* like to know," he said, inhaling greedily, as if he had not smoked for hours. "I know you've got to sign that order. You can't help it. But what I want to know is whether you really believe all those labels?"

"What labels?"

"That they've pasted on me. First in the newspapers, then at the University, and now, not to be behind the others, here at the Institute."

"Explain what you mean by 'labels.'"

"Explain? All those words and phrases: 'Esthete,' 'formalist,' 'one who fawns on bourgeois culture'—I can't remember them all." Unable to sustain the moderate tone with which he had begun, his voice grew ever more shrill and excited. "Rubber stamps, that's what they are—rubber stamps! Stick out your neck and they'll stamp them all over you!"

"Do you consider all the accusations false?"

"Not all. I admit that there has been a certain element of formalism in my course, and in my approach. And I ad-

mit I have not always properly understood and appreciated certain aspects of Soviet literature. But Soviet literature is not my speciality; I let it severely alone. In a word, I never gave voice to my erroneous views in my lectures. I also admit that my book on Dostoyevsky was wrong in many respects. But what has that to do with 'cosmopolitanism'? With 'worship of bourgeois culture'? Am I accused of these things because I showed what a profound influence Dostoyevsky had on world literature? That is a fact. There's no denying facts. Besides it shows the influence of Russian literature on Western literature, and not the reverse! Damn it all! Why don't you say something?"

Sizov sat silent, glumly staring at his broad, heavy hand with the swollen veins, the thumb and little finger of which were lightly tapping the desk. It was hard for him to talk to Kozelsky. Very hard. Hard because they had known each other for so many years, and because it was not a youth sitting before him, but an elderly man whose life was almost spent. And spent, or so it seemed to him, not entirely as it should have been—in fact, not at *all* as it should have been. It was going to be hard to tell him this frankly, to his face, without evasion. Especially since he had not had a serious, intimate talk with Kozelsky for thirty years. He had had no opportunity to do this—and no desire. In fact, he had avoided such a talk, which could only have given offence and led to complications. For some reason he had always thought that Kozelsky himself would come to feel and understand things properly. Apparently he had been mistaken.

"Well, why don't you say something?" repeated Kozelsky irritably. "Don't you agree that Dostoyevsky influenced world literature?"

"Dostoyevsky? What has Dostoyevsky to do with it?" asked Sizov in vexation. "That's not what you and I have got to talk about."

"It isn't? Then what is? Be good enough to tell me."

"What?" Sizov sighed and slowly rubbed his brow. "You say that they've pasted labels on you. Formalism, and estheticism, and undue veneration. . . ."

"Veneration!" interrupted Kozelsky with a bitter little laugh.

"Let's try to see what is meant by formalism," Sizov went on.

"By all means," nodded Kozelsky, settling himself deeper in the chair. "I'm ready."

"Formalism, you see. . ." Sizov paused for a second, frowned, and clenched his fist. How difficult it was to speak of even such a simple thing! This was no boy sitting before him, no postgraduate student. It was a grey-haired man, with a long life behind him, and his head full of book learning. He ought to understand these things without having them explained. What could he say to him?

With a sigh, Sizov said slowly:

"You're like Chekhov's professor who was interested not in Shakespeare, but in the commentaries to his plays."

"Enough of that!" cried Kozelsky, waving his hand as though thrusting something away. "Enough of those childish examples, those empty words, those meaningless quotations! Answer me like a human being: what do you find wrong with me?"

"All right, then, listen." Sizov gently struck the table with his fist. "What does formalism—that is, the over-emphasizing of form—lead to? To a conscious or unconscious relegating of substance to second place, which in its turn leads to the development of estheticism in art. That's why you are unable to understand the essence of our socialist literature, unable to perceive its superiority over the bourgeois literature of the West. And that is why you are accused of worshipping bourgeois literature. . . ."

"That's not what I wanted to say," thought Sizov to himself. "Flat, lifeless platitudes. I seem to be speaking other people's words, in another person's voice. . . ."

"Sheer casuistry!" muttered Kozelsky, lifting a shoulder. "You might as well accuse me of being a Jesuit, a freemason, or a member of the Black Hundred! My God! To think of me being accused of fawning on bourgeois literature!" He jumped to his feet in his agitation. "But you know me, Miron, and you knew my family. I'm Russian to the bone, to the depths of my soul, and I love Russia and Russian literature more than life itself. And that's not an empty phrase, Miron! You remember my father's offering to send me to France in 1918, and my refusing? He left, but I remained here—in Russia—with the revolution—with you, Miron."

"And what led you to remain here?"

"And still they accuse me of fawning on the West!" continued Kozelsky, ignoring the question. "Who was it made a plea for the originality of Blok, proving that his genius was uniquely Russian? When that Frenchman came to Petrograd in 1915—what was his name?—remember how I squelched him in public when he dared to say that Blok—that Blok—do you remember?"

"No," said Sizov softly. "I don't remember. And it's absurd for you to remember such things, Boris."

"Absurd?" repeated Kozelsky dully, sinking into the chair again. "Absurd! So I've reached the stage at which I'm absurd." Suddenly straightening up, he cried wrathfully: "*I'm* not the one who is absurd. The absurd thing is that a man who has known me for forty years should mechanically repeat all these vulgar, senseless platitudes! It is absurd that he is unable to give me a sane, logical explanation, showing wherein I am at fault, what I have done! It's absurd that he should lose the power of human speech, and be capable only of babbling dry formulas, like a parrot. Absurd that. . ."

"Stop!"

The unexpectedness with which Sizov brought his palm down on the desk made Kozelsky break off abruptly. Sizov

stood up—short, thickset, his face flushing darkly—and took up his stand in front of Kozelsky.

"Do you want me to say everything I've kept to myself these forty years?" he asked breathlessly.

"Well—I—er. . ." muttered Kozelsky, recoiling.

"All right then, listen! I'm not going to speak to you about your formalism, or your estheticism—those are mere results. The cause is more complex, and I'm afraid no one has ever spoken to you about that. The cause lies in the fact that for forty years, for forty terrific, epoch-making years, you've been living the wrong sort of life. The only thing you've worried about has been how to save your skin. You have adopted an attitude of detached scepticism. Very convenient—noncommittal."

Kozelsky half rose in his chair:

"I beg your pardon. . ."

"No, you deserve no pardon. Everything has changed during these forty years—the country, the people, the whole of life. Boris Matveyevich Kozelsky alone has changed no more than the sphinx. Your detached scepticism was fashionable at the beginning of the century; later it became ridiculous, and finally harmful. Never in your life have you shown the slightest concern for anything but your own well-being, Boris! Do you remember how Merkulov, Ostapenko, Richter—twenty students including myself, were expelled from the University? You were the only one who wasn't, and that was because—forgetting your scepticism for the moment, but not your comfort—you went to the rector and begged forgiveness. . . . But it's hardly worth recalling!"

Kozelsky, too, had risen, and the men stood facing each other—the sturdy, short-legged Sizov, his whole body straining forward aggressively; and the long, lean Kozelsky, his hands thrust ineffectually into his pockets, his head held higher than usual. Taking out a handkerchief, Ko-

zelsky wiped his brow with a shaking hand and murmured softly and unintelligibly, as if in wonder:

"But just think how long ago that was, Miron!"

"Yes, that was very long ago," assented Sizov. "Then came the revolution, which you observed from the windows of the Encyclopedia offices. And then you began scaling the heights—the heights of your own cosy little mountain, with its easy ascents and convenient slopes—for you the most important and conspicuous peak in the world. And you reached quite a height. To what end? Where has it brought you?"

"Let me say a word. . . ."

"No, I haven't finished yet!"

"Miron!"

Kozelsky stretched out his hand as if to stop Sizov, but the latter seized it and would have pushed it away, had not Kozelsky resisted. After a moment of silent struggle, Kozelsky surrendered.

"You're stronger than I am, I know," said Sizov, breathing hard. "You've taken good care of yourself. When others were building institutes in the wilderness, you were playing tennis in Moscow. Remember my inviting you to go to Central Asia with me? Naturally you refused. That was too risky. . . ."

"You know very well I couldn't go then!" protested Kozelsky. "I was in such a state after my experience with that woman—my first wife. . . ."

"That's a lie! Why should you distort the truth?" said Sizov, mercilessly fixing him with his eye. "We have not so much longer to live, you and I, and neither tennis nor gymnastics will give you a second life. You might as well be honest now, at the finish. You know very well it wasn't a woman who prevented your going with me, it wasn't external circumstances. You just didn't want to go. You've never put your whole heart into anything, never really done anything thoroughly. You've always done everything

with one hand, because you needed the other to hang on to your own well-being. And now life is coming to a close. And what is there to show for it? What is this dearly-bought well-being, after all?"

Sizov, now perfectly calm, was speaking in his usual even tones. He began pacing up and down the room, his hands firmly clasped behind his back, his eyes on the floor. Then he halted in the middle of the room, as if to study the pattern of the rug.

"Well," he went on, bending his head even lower, "that well-being turns out to have been only a myth. And your work, your books and articles—they're all a thing of the past, of no use to anyone in the present—of no use at all. You have no followers. Or if you ever had any, they've forgotten you. And your present work is unsatisfactory—it is simply bad. Below the passing mark. And that's the whole story. I won't repeat what was said at the Council. You yourself admitted that you had a tendency to formalism, to put it mildly. It was no tendency—it was formalism, pure and simple, with a tendency—a very slight one—towards contemporary views. That you couldn't help—life demanded such a tendency. In your lectures you simply ignored Soviet literature, and when it did come up in conversation with the students you treated it superciliously. Because you don't know it and don't love it, just as you don't know and don't love our young people. And all these things taken together have brought you, naturally enough, to your present situation, Boris. So there you are!"

Sizov walked over to his desk, pulled out his chair violently, and sat down.

"That's all I have to say." After a moment's pause, he suddenly smiled and added, with a shade of relief in his voice: "And not a single 'meaningless quotation'!"

Kozelsky was leaning over in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. For a long time he said

nothing. Sizov lighted the lamp on his desk, looked through some papers, jotted down some notes, tore up a paper, and threw the pieces into the wastepaper basket. . . . Kozelsky still sat there, silent and motionless. Suddenly he said:

"Do you remember that winter day at the beginning of 1918 when I met you in Petrograd?"

"Yes," replied Sizov.

"Perhaps—I don't know—perhaps in what you have said there is an element . . ." he stopped for a moment and swallowed as if something had risen in his throat, "an element of truth. Although—but no, there probably is. Well, anyway, I just happened to recall that meeting—very vividly. And I want to explain something. You had just returned from the front—in a soldier's cap, with a rifle in your hands. I asked you to help me to find a fitting post, but you had no time. You said if I wanted to, I could go back to the front with you. I spent the whole night thinking it over. I wasn't frightened by the war—the thought of getting killed, and all the rest. It wasn't cowardice that made me waver. But it seemed to me that a person ought to be firmly convinced of the rightness of a cause for which he volunteers to lay down his life." Kozelsky lightly hammered on his knee with his fist, but his voice sounded softer and more hesitant than ever. "Was my conviction strong enough? That was the question I had to decide. I felt that on this decision depended the whole course of my life. Well, I remained in Petrograd. After that the years passed, without war and suffering, and gradually I came to accept the Soviet ideology. It was expressed in everything about me—in people, in work, in the very air, and I absorbed it, so to speak, as a matter of course. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? And I firmly believed in it."

"One's ideology is not merely to be absorbed, Boris. It is something to be fought for."

"Oh, yes, I know," Kozelsky hastened to assent as he got up out of his chair. "I never was a fighter. But I was honest. And I loved my work. That's the main thing, don't you agree?"

"Perhaps. But the age demands such supreme, unprecedented devotion to principles, that the slightest deviation lands one in an abyss. Your inherent bourgeois inclinations crystallized into formalism, into an involuntary worship of bourgeois culture, d'you see what I mean? You must begin studying all over again, Boris. You must study and learn to understand many things before you have a right to teach others."

Now it was Kozelsky who silently paced the floor. Only two bright spots on his cheeks relieved his pallor. Suddenly halting, he gave a short laugh and said:

"Do you know what just came into my head? A vision of that room you and I shared for a short time on Vasilievsky Island. The pink wallpaper, the little bust of Schiller, and that incongruous pier glass with the lions on it. . . . At that time it seemed to me that I understood everything. Life was an open book, with all its problems solved. And now it seems I'm only beginning to understand—after all these years—a whole lifetime. Well, thanks for the lesson."

Kozelsky said good-bye and walked quickly to the door. For a second his lean old figure paused in the open doorway as he said:

"I may as well confess, Miron, that I always thought you envied me. I see I was wrong. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Sizov.

He listened to the retreating footsteps. Then he summoned his secretary and handed her the signed order. For a while he sat motionless, one hand over his eyes. His heart was pounding, and he was conscious of a dull pain deep within his chest. Old age. There was only one person who remembered him in his youth. The man who had just left.

At that moment Krylov entered the office. Sizov removed his hand and sat up. The two men sat till late at night discussing plans for a students' scientific conference.

"I think we ought to call a meeting of the Council of Studies anyhow," said Sizov, when everything else was settled. "What do you think, Fyodor Andreyevich?"

"I agree. Not to discuss Kozelsky—there's no need of that any more—but to make clear the very essence of formalism. And we must make it an open meeting, so that everyone will understand why Kozelsky has been dismissed. Last week Belov dropped in to see me. He was planning to speak against Kozelsky, and came to consult me. He's a smart chap—sees right to the root of things. But I told him the Council meeting was cancelled because Kozelsky was leaving the Institute."

"But we must hold it. It's absolutely essential," insisted Sizov. After a moment's pause, he added in a strained voice: "Kozelsky and I went to school together, Fyodor Andreyevich. We were in the same grade."

"Were you, really?" exclaimed Krylov in surprise. "I never would have guessed it. For some reason I thought he was considerably younger—er, that is—older." For a second Krylov said nothing, then he laughed and gave a little wave of his hand: "What I mean to say is, you're not contemporaries, Miron Mikhailovich! That's it! You don't seem to belong to the same generation at all!"

Chapter 21

After lectures on Saturday, Sergei approached Vadim in the corridor. He was wearing his best grey suit and a new and very smart blue sweater.

"You can congratulate me, old top," he said with a smile. "I've already received it."

"What?"

"The scholarship," Sergei winked and patted his hip

pocket. "The beer's on me. By the way, do you know that my article on Turgenev is to be published?"

"No. Where?"

"In the *Smena** magazine. That's not the *Literary Heritage*,** of course, but still I had to cut it down almost to half the length. I don't like that much, but on the whole it's nice, isn't it?"

"Very."

"You bet it is!" Sergei grabbed Vadim about the shoulders and roughly pulled him over. "And you still have it in for me? Well, things turned out my way, anyway! My way, Palavin's way, damn it all!" He gave a triumphant little laugh, and added somewhat critically: "I'm afraid you've got a streak of envy in you, Vadim. You're going to have a hard time in life. And now tell me the truth: were you hoping Andrei would get the scholarship?"

"Yes, I was."

"Really?" Sergei gazed at Vadim through narrowed eyes which suddenly grew hostile. Slowly he said: "I thought I was mistaken, but it seems I wasn't. But why did you? Can you tell me that?"

"Andrei deserved it more."

"No he didn't, Vadim. You can't imagine how sure of myself I am! I'm on the up now, and nothing's going to stop me. In March I'll finish my novel—it seems to be turning out rather well—and then I'll make application to join the Party. And Andrei . . . well, what has he to show for himself? Between ourselves, Vadim—and you can be sure I'm being absolutely unprejudiced—Andrei's a very ordinary person. Can you tell me in what respect he is the least bit outstanding?"

* *Smena*—a popular magazine published for the youth in the Soviet Union.—*Tr.*

** *Literary Heritage*—a weighty literary magazine published by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences.—*Tr.*

"Why try to convince me? You got what you were after, didn't you?"

"All right, all right," said Sergei, magnanimously holding out his hand. "We'll let it go at that. By the way, have you read the article on Kozelsky in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*? Simply tears him to pieces."

"What for?"

"It's a long article. His book on Dostoyevsky again. Formalism, and an unscientific approach. It seems that the University chucked him even before we did."

"He's certainly been given a proper shaking-up."

"What else was to be expected? There's no denying that the old man was on the wrong tack." Sergei sighed and pursed his lips regretfully. "However sorry you feel, you've got to admit that he had it coming to him."

At that moment Lena Medovskaya and Andrei approached.

"Hullo, boys!" said Lena. "Andrei and I have a marvellous idea. Oh, Sergei, wherever did you get such a dream of a sweater? In a shop, or made to order?"

"My true love knitted it for me, all through the night," said Sergei. "But how could you and Andrei have an idea, let alone a marvellous one?"

"Our idea is to spend a day in the country tomorrow—at Andrei's country house."

"Do you mean to say Andrei owns a country house?"

"Oh well—you know what I mean. Don't quibble. Do let's go, boys! Just the four of us. We'll walk, and ski, and take the air. I'm just dying to go to the country!"

"Just the weather for skiing," put in Andrei. "I can't bear to see you languishing in town. How about it, Sergei? Oh, by the way, I haven't congratulated you on the scholarship." He held out his hand, and Sergei took it, making an elaborate bow and pressing his left hand to his heart. "Do come, you fellows."

"I'm all for it," said Vadim.

"So am I," said Sergei.

"Then we'll really go?" cried Lena, clapping her hands with joy. "That's simply divine! I'm just pining for the country. Only don't invite anyone else—just the four of us. Oh Vadim, I haven't seen you for ages!" she said suddenly.

He looked at her quizzically.

"Has it really been so long?"

"Perhaps not really, but I've missed you. Truly I have."

Vadim looked into her clear, smiling eyes, and thought to himself, as he toyed with his cigarette: "You would never have said such a thing or smiled in such a way if we were alone."

"Dima and I spend all our free time at the plant," said Andrei. "With that circle of ours."

"Aren't you bored to death?"

"We have no time to be bored."

"I want to treat the subject in my novel," said Palavin. "Not an amateur show like yours, of course—on a much broader and more significant scale. Such a theme requires broad treatment. I'm using it in the last chapter but one."

"Oh, what a dull novel it'll be!" cried Lena, making a face.

"You don't understand a thing, Lena," said Palavin.

"Of course not. How could I be expected to? Well, so everything's settled for tomorrow? Call me up in the morning, Vadim, so that we can all meet at the station. About nine o'clock. Will you be sure to call, Vadim?" This time her glance was stern and imperious.

"I will," he nodded.

Vadim was still living alone—his mother was at a sanatorium, recuperating after her operation. At his request, a neighbour woke him at seven the next morning. It was still dark outside, and the street lamps were lighted.

The radio weather forecast was for a windless day and a mild frost, without snow. At eight o'clock Vadim called up Sergei. Irina Victorovna answered the phone and said that Sergei was still in bed, but she would call him. At least five minutes passed before Vadim heard Sergei's sleepy voice. He gave a long yawn into the phone, made senseless answers, and seemed not to understand what Vadim wanted of him. When finally he remembered their agreement, he said, "Oh!" and fell silent.

"Well, why don't you say something?" asked Vadim impatiently.

"I'm thinking. . . . Listen, I'm afraid I can't go today. Apologize to Lena and Andrei for me. Tell them I decided to finish writing a chapter. I can't afford to waste the time. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

Vadim forgave him without any argument. Secretly he was glad Sergei wasn't going. "But he's lying about finishing a chapter," thought Vadim. "He just doesn't want Lena to see that I ski better than he does." At exactly half past eight Vadim called Lena. She herself answered the telephone. Her voice sounded bright and fresh.

"Hullo, Dima! Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for ages."

"Then why didn't you call me sooner? You said you would at eight. I'm ready too and I've been wondering why you didn't call."

"I'm leaving right away," said Vadim. "Sergei's not coming. I called him up."

"Really? What a pity!" She was silent for a moment. "Let's meet at the bus stop in about—why isn't he coming?"

"He says he's going to finish writing a chapter."

"Oh, well, let him! We'll meet at the bus stop at a quarter past nine. Shall I bring my skis?"

"No, don't bother. Andrei has skis for us."

"All right," and she hung up the receiver.

Forty minutes later Vadim was climbing the Metro steps at the Byelorussian Station to take up his place in the queue at the suburban bus stop. It was a winter queue—not very long; mostly workers going home after the night shift.

Vadim did not take the first bus, since Lena had not yet arrived. Now he stood first in the queue. A half hour passed, during which Vadim let two more buses pass. People came and went, but Vadim remained standing there. When the fourth bus pulled out, almost empty, Vadim realized that Lena was not coming.

Chilled to the bone, he decided to leave without her, but now the bus seemed to refuse to come out of sheer spite. Vadim was neither grieved nor upset. He was simply sick and tired of standing there. And his feet were cold. He was annoyed with himself, and the delayed bus, and the weather bureau, and he felt humiliated.

At last it came, a large "ZIS" with rimy windows in which little black peepholes had been blown. The passengers climbed in, grunting and shivering and breathing out plumes of vapour. When everyone was seated, the bus was still half empty. At the door sat a girl conductor with beet-red cheeks, swathed in so many clothes that she looked like one of those padded dolls used for tea cosies. The bus bounced and rocked and gave off whiffs of petrol. Vadim lost all interest in the trip and just sat there, huddled together, staring at the driver's broad leather-clad back. Gradually he dozed off, and when a rut in the road jerked him to consciousness, he thought: "Why am I here? Where am I going?"

People kept getting off at the stops, but few boarded the bus. At last there were only three people left—the conductor, Vadim, and a man snoring on a back seat. The bus began to descend a hill. Through the windshield Vadim caught glimpses of wooden fences, snow-covered roofs,

and trees. Then it came to a stop. Vadim stumbled to the door on cramped legs and jumped out.

He found himself in snowy stillness. How quiet it was! Great pine trees stood motionless in the windless air, their tops reared against a white and tranquil sky. On a bench at the bus stop sat a little boy in a sheepskin coat and felt boots, drawing figures on the snow with a ski stick. Beside him lay his skis. He looked up disappointedly as Vadim jumped out of the empty bus; evidently he was expecting someone from Moscow. From beyond the trees came the cries of the jackdaws. Vadim stood motionless for a moment. His head swam from the fragrance of the snow and the pines, and from that amazing stillness.

Andrei's house stood at the end of the highway, on the very last street. And while Vadim walked over the packed snow of the road, drinking in the serenity of the scene, his head cleared, and his sense of annoyance gradually disappeared like a puff of smoke in the crystal air of the pine woods.

Vadim caught sight of Andrei standing at the gate of a one-storeyed house with an attic. Andrei, hatless, in high black felt boots and a woollen sweater, was nailing a hook to the gate.

"Where are the others?"

"They couldn't come," said Vadim. "Sergei is writing, and Lena is busy with something or other."

Andrei shrugged his shoulders and gave a particularly hard blow with his hammer.

"All the worse for them. This is just the day for skiing. Here, hold this!" He inserted a second nail and drove it half way in with a single blow. "Well, I'm glad you've come anyway—been expecting you since early morning."

When the hook was in place, Andrei led Vadim to the house. They went through a small garden, along a path lined with dry stalks of campanula. A black dog, looking as ragged and unkempt as all watch dogs in winter do,

came running out. With a few feeble barks, it ran up to Andrei, sniffed at Vadim, and went away to roll in the snow.

"That's a sure sign of snow," remarked Andrei. "Well, here's our manor house."

They climbed the steps to a high, glazed verandah with a pile of wood in one corner and the wet marks of felt boots leading to the door. When they had entered the house they went straight to Andrei's room, which was warm and neat. A bright oriental rug covered the entire wall above his desk. To this rug was pinned a piece of paper on which was written in red pencil: "Andrei Sirikh's Daily Schedule." Every hour was accounted for: setting-up exercises, meals, hours for study and for doing odd jobs about the house. Underneath the schedule stood a signature: "Olga Sirikh, Chairman of Family Affairs."

"An impressive document," observed Vadim. "Olga—your sister Olga?"

"Yes, don't you remember meeting her that evening at the Institute?"

"Oh, yes. Where is she now?"

"Shopping. You should have seen the preparations she made for your coming! Terrific! Cleaned up the house. Look what she did to my desk—it's fit to be photographed. Scrubbed the floors. I said, what's all the fuss about? Who'll notice your floors? But she sat on me, called me a sloven, told me *she* was the housewife, *she* was receiving guests, and things would be as *she* wanted them, and I could just shut up. Now tell me the truth, did you notice the floors?"

"I've hardly had time. . . ."

"What did I tell you! And she's had a backache ever since yesterday!"

"Well, the floors do shine. There's no doubt about that," said Vadim, lifting one foot to look at that particular spot.

"Floors are floors. But enough of such low talk. Let's have something to eat."

Vadim said he wasn't hungry.

"Well, we'll go into the kitchen anyway. I've been given orders to make a fire in the stove."

Andrei went out on to the verandah and brought in an armful of wood, which he dropped with a clatter in front of the kitchen stove. Vadim sat on a stool and watched him fuss with wood, paper and matches.

"So you say Lena was busy?" asked Andrei.

Vadim nodded. After a moment's pause, he involuntarily said aloud what he had been thinking during his ride to the country.

"I suppose she just didn't want to come."

"Why not? She was so keen on it yesterday."

"It's hard to make her out."

"I bet I know why she didn't come." Andrei noisily blew at the flames. "It won't catch, damn it all! Because Sergei didn't, isn't that it?"

"Perhaps."

"Of course that's why. Here, let's have another match."

Vadim handed him the matches and suddenly asked:

"Have you ever been in love, Andrei?"

"Yes."

"Who was she?" asked Vadim absent-mindedly, his thoughts on his own affairs.

"A girl who worked at the factory when I did." Andrei's voice came muffled from inside the stove.

"That was a long time ago. What about now?" Vadim asked, suddenly interested.

"I still love her."

"Do you ever see her?"

"No. I haven't seen her for four years."

Once more he took to blowing up the fire. Vadim watched his shoulder blades moving beneath the sweater spanning his powerful back, and said in some amazement:

"Such a long time?"

"She went to Leningrad. The damn wood's damp," muttered Andrei, carefully evading Vadim's gaze. "I should have dried it last night."

"What's her name?" asked Vadim.

"Galina," said Andrei, his voice trembling in spite of his efforts to sound nonchalant. Apparently it was the first time he had spoken on this subject, and he wished to hide his emotion.

The fire suddenly flared up and crackled, giving off a faint odour of wood smoke. Andrei thrust a wad of paper into the stove and closed the door. The fire roared, setting the chimney humming. Andrei stood up.

"Well, are you happy?" asked Vadim.

Andrei's face was still flushed with strain.

"Yes, I am," he nodded. "She wrote me she was coming here in the spring. She's twenty-two." He stood leaning against the wall and smiling. "Are you surprised? I can't explain how it happened myself. She ran a press in the machine shop. And now she's in her last year of medical school."

"Why should I be surprised? I'm glad," said Vadim.

"Nobody else knows about it. Not even Olga."

"I'm glad for you," repeated Vadim, and he really was glad, though the feeling was tinged with sadness.

He pulled his stool closer and opened the stove door to gaze at the fire. The bright flames leaped and danced, intertwining and forming transparent bubbles of light. How suddenly and furiously the flame is born! Only a minute before the damp wood had been smouldering in a cold, dark hole. And now this hole was filled with a fiery ebullition, the fierce roaring and crackling of a volcano in eruption. How easy it would be to quench this miniature Vesuvius—to rake it, stamp it, drown it out. A single pail of water, and the flames would die, leaving the hole cold and dark again.

"Are you in love, Vadim?" he heard Andrei asking softly.

His face burned and his eyes stung. He closed the door of the stove and stood up.

"I was, Andrei," he said with a little laugh. "I was, but I'm not any more."

"How's that?"

"I don't know. A pail of cold water. . . ."

He looked at the perplexed Andrei and again gave a little laugh.

"That was long ago, Andrei," he said, stretching and feigning to yawn. "After the first pail came another, and another, each one colder than the last. I suppose it was my fault. Now the wind has blown even the ashes away. Let's go out into the garden."

There they met Olga, returning from her shopping, gaily swinging a basket stuffed with provisions. Her face lengthened when she learned that Vadim had come alone.

"Oh, dear," she said with vexation. "And I was so looking forward to meeting the famous Lena Medovskaya! I even scrubbed the floors."

"By the way, Vadim never even noticed them," said Andrei.

"Of course he didn't, but Lena would have, because she's a woman. Here," she said, holding out the basket to Andrei. "Look how heavy it is! You might have come to meet me. I hope you've lighted the stove at least."

"Aye, aye, captain!"

When they were inside, Olga called Vadim into the dining room to see her plants. The room was full of them; they stood on the window sills, the sideboard, the table, and even hung from the ceiling.

"I don't suppose Andrei bothered to show them to you, did he? Do you like flowers? My brother's such a dry old stick, he doesn't even notice them, and boasts of the fact,"

she said with animation. "That's ivy hanging there. And this is iris—it grows very fast. And this poor thing is a wax tree. Andrei tortures it to death."

"How?"

"Smoking. It can't stand smoke. You didn't catch him smoking in here, did you?"

"No, we didn't come in here at all."

"Olga, what's this you bought?" came Andrei's voice from the other room. "Wine?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"But why?" asked Andrei, entering the room with the bottle in his hand.

"Why not?" retorted Olga, colouring "For your guests. Only I don't know whether you'll like it. It's vermouth. I asked for something not too expensive."

"Where did you get the money?"

"My stipend. Besides, it's none of your business where I got it. If you don't like it, I'll drink it myself." Olga angrily snatched the bottle out of his hands and stood it on the sideboard. "Vadim and I will drink it—and Dad."

Then Olga went on showing Vadim her plants, taking him over to a small pot standing on a separate table. Out of the pot thrust a tiny sprout no more than two inches high. From the expression on her face, Vadim guessed that this was the crowning gem in her collection.

"Can you guess what this is?" she asked eagerly. Vadim said his ignorance of botany made it useless for him to guess.

"Bend down and smell it."

Vadim obediently bent down and smelled it. However he tried, he could only catch the odour of damp earth.

"Well?" asked Olga.

"It smells good," said Vadim evasively. "Like some sort of a flower."

"A flower? It's a lemon tree! It smells of lemon!" exclaimed Olga. "You must have a cold in your head. In

fifteen years that little sprout will be a full-grown lemon tree!"

"That's when Dima will smell it," said Andrei. "By that time his cold will have passed. By the way, Dima, I have a cold too, and so has Dad."

Olga glanced at her brother witheringly.

"Very well, Andrei, you can be sure you won't get a single one of the lemons. Let's have dinner."

After dinner, they rested for half an hour and then decided to go skiing. Andrei brought Vadim a pair of skis, and they tried them out in the garden while Olga was changing her clothes. Their skis were strong ones, already broken in, with metal fastenings. Vadim took some sharp turns and put his skis through various tests, getting the good tight feel of the fastenings.

At last Olga came running out in a grey sweater and blue ski trousers, a fluffy fur cap on her head. She bent over lithely to fasten her skis, and when she straightened up Vadim was suddenly aware of the slender, graceful lines of her figure, emphasized by the snug-fitting sweater.

"Hurry up there, Olga," said Andrei impatiently as he slid up and down in front of the house.

"I'm ready," she said, pulling on her gloves.

They went out to the highway, and at the first corner turned off into a forest path. It was one of those calm, bright winter days when there is no sun, and no sun is needed, so blindingly white is the snow. For a while wooden fences enclosing boarded-up summer cottages extended on the right. There was deep snow on the roofs of the houses, and the paths leading to them were snowed up. Soon the fences ended, and they found themselves in vast fields where occasional hillocks looked like white haystacks. A fringe of forest marked the horizon, and a pine and fir wood rose on their left. After a brief argument, Andrei and Olga decided to turn off into the wood.

"I'm leaving you here," said Andrei. "I have to drop

into one of the rest homes and phone Dad. Where shall I find you?"

"Over the river, on the Tatar Hills," answered Olga.

"All right. I'll catch up with you."

He turned off and immediately vanished among the trees.

"Now I'll take the lead," said Olga, overtaking Vadim. "For one thing, you don't know the road, and for another, it's been very rude of you to turn your back to me all the time."

"I've been laying the trail for you," said Vadim.

"Now I'll do it. You go too slow anyway."

"Oho! Let's have a race."

"Catch me!"

Without a glance behind, she sped ahead, her fur cap flashing among the trees like a brown bird. Vadim followed her at a leisurely pace, sure of being able to overtake her in the first twenty metres. But she made such headway that he had to quicken his pace, and at last he found himself pursuing her at top speed. Olga would unexpectedly turn on the path and disappear in a clump of young firs, leaving Vadim to guess where she was from the snapping of twigs and the swish of her skis. But he did catch up with her. On reaching a clearing in the woods, he cut across her trail, swooping down upon her, whistling shrilly through his fingers. She just managed to reach the other side of the clearing and duck beneath a spreading fir tree. Vadim flew after her, both ski sticks in his left hand so as to catch his prey within his right. But Olga struck the branches with her ski stick, bringing down great piles of snow on his head. Blinded and gasping, he grabbed for her sweater while she stood watching him, convulsed with laughter.

"You look like a regular Father Christmas! Shake yourself!" The snow slid down Vadim's neck as he brushed it away.

"I caught you!" he triumphed. "You didn't manage to get very far."

"But it was hard, wasn't it? If you could only see yourself! Oh dear, oh dear!" she laughed, wiping her streaming eyes on her bare wrist. "You came tearing through the woods like a bear! Why are you holding on to me? The game's over."

"And you lost."

"Oh no I didn't! I just couldn't keep going for laughing."

They slid forward side by side.

"How old are you, Olga?"

"Over eighteen," she said, tossing her head proudly.

"Oh, what an old lady! Much over?"

"Isn't that rather an indiscreet question?"

"Even if it is."

"Two months over. You better go in front now, or you'll be asking me where I study and what marks I get. Go ahead."

Vadim took the lead and Olga gave directions from behind. But of her own accord she told him she was at an agricultural college and dreamed of becoming a forestry expert.

"As soon as I finish college, I'll go off to work somewhere far, far away, at the very end of the earth," she said. "To Siberia, or the Urals, and work on a reservation. After spending two or three years there, I'll go to the Forestry Institute in Leningrad or Moscow. How do you like that for a speciality, being a phytopathologist—a tree doctor?"

"I like it. Only I think doctoring humans would be more interesting."

"Oh, I don't know." After a moment's consideration, Olga said: "There are millions of acres of forest in our country, and not nearly enough tree doctors. That's the point. I wanted terribly to help plant trees for the new

shelter belts this year, but I suppose there'll be plenty of work left for me, won't there?"

"Plenty. You have lots of time."

"I know. The most interesting thing of all is to go on expeditions. Last summer I went to the Voronezh Region with an expedition from the Academy of Sciences. We lived right in the middle of an old oak forest."

They were going ahead slowly, side by side now, Olga describing the expedition. Never before had she been away from home for any length of time, and the experience had made a deep impression on her. Vadim scarcely asked a question, merely listened with silent interest to her enthusiastic account of their life under canvas in the forest, the jolly students who had been her companions, the interesting professors who headed the expedition, the mosquitoes which tortured them in June but soon disappeared and were followed by mushrooms. She had eaten so many mushrooms that she never wanted to see one again. They had been studying mycorrhiza of oaks, one of the most important problems in that field at present, for the oak is of primary importance in forest planting. In the evening the night jars had come out and chirped like chickens, and. . .

"But where are we? This is Bezdonka!" she exclaimed all of a sudden, coming to a halt.

"What is Bezdonka?"

"A lake. And we were to have gone to the river."

They were standing at the edge of the woods. Before them extended the even surface of the frozen lake, the high bank of the opposite shore spotted with russet-coloured bushes. The reeds encircling the lake stuck crisply out of the snow, and a raven was hopping on the icy surface.

"It's all my fault," said Olga in vexation. "We've lost a whole hour. We must hurry; Andrei is probably waiting for us on the hills."

It was already getting dark when, having crossed some fields and the ice of the Moscow River, they came to the Tatar Hills. The woods were thinner on this side of the river, and consisted only of pines. A maze of ski tracks led to the hills, but neither here nor in the woods did they meet a soul.

"This is the Big Hill," said Olga, pointing her stick at a bald, snow-covered height rising from among young pines. "We named it that when we were little. It looked enormous to us then, now it seems to have grown old and bald and shrunken. But the pines have grown!"

They climbed the hill, but did not find Andrei there, and nobody responded to Vadim's calls. Only the echo kept rebounding in the hollow below: "...ei! ...ei!"

"He's gone home," concluded Olga. "It's all my fault."

From where they were standing they could see the opposite bank of the river, a misty white strip of field, and a dark blur of forest, formless in the twilight. Lights winked on the horizon, and here and there among the trees.

"Those over there are in the factory rest home," explained Olga. "The nearer ones are in Borskoye Village, the further ones in Troitskoye."

The wind was blowing, and from somewhere came the scent of burning pine needles.

Vadim was the first to descend the hill and take the jumps at the bottom. There were two jumps—one small one, only half a metre, the other two metres. He was surprised to find that he could still jump without falling, for he hadn't tried it for seven years. He was followed by Olga, who came down with shouts and squeals, but quite safely, and perhaps more skilfully than Vadim. She squealed only for the fun of it. The only tiresome thing was climbing up the hill again.

"You're good at this," said Vadim as he watched her scramble quickly to the top.

Tired out by their efforts they rested for a while.

"You ski down better than Andrei," said Olga breathlessly, pulling off her cap and wiping her forehead. "Ugh, you could wring me out! . . . I'm not a bit afraid, with you."

She smiled and glanced at Vadim with radiant eyes. Her face was flushed and her lashes were coated with hoarfrost.

"What's there to be afraid of?"

"Look how dark it's getting."

"What of it?"

"And the wind's blowing."

There really was a wind. It soughed through the pines, the noise growing ever louder until it resembled the distant roar of engines. Snow and dry pine needles were blown off the branches.

"There'll probably be snow," said Olga, glancing anxiously at the sky. "Don't you think we'd better go home?"

Vadim agreed, and as soon as they descended the hill a sudden and inexplicable darkness enveloped them. Was it the night that had swooped down so unexpectedly, or an unperceived cloud? Snow began to fall. Olga ran ahead as fast as she could, without glancing behind. The falling snow struck them full force when they reached the field leading to the river, obliterating everything. It came down steadily and so thickly that they seemed to hear it fall. The riverbank was blotted out and the ski tracks were no longer visible.

Vadim could not see Olga; he could only hear the rhythmic swish of her skis and the soft padding of her sticks. Before they reached the river the wind had attained such force that it was driving the snow into their faces,

taking their breath away. On every hand was this whirling, impenetrable mass of snow.

"Stop, Olga!" cried Vadim, but the minute he opened his mouth he choked on the wind and the snow.

"I can't see the road!" came Olga's frightened voice.

She halted so suddenly that he ran into her and almost fell.

"Follow me!" he cried. "I'll go first."

"Where's the river?"

"Can you keep going?"

"Yes, only my skis have come unfastened."

He stooped down and for a long time fumbled with the frozen straps, rubbing his numb fingers with snow to make them limber. "If only we could reach the woods," he thought, thoroughly alarmed. He was afraid Olga might grow too weak to keep going, or that she might catch cold and fall ill. He imagined how worried Andrei and his father must be, and blamed himself for not having made Olga return home sooner.

They had to cross the river to enter the woods. But where was the river? Vadim moved on as if by instinct. His skis sank into the snow and he made very little progress. After every ten or twelve steps he turned and waited for Olga, who kept going slower and slower. At last she stopped altogether.

"We're lost," she said suddenly, with a soft laugh. "You must be sorry you ever came to see us."

He could not utter a word. He only shook his head.

"But I'm glad," she whispered. "Come along. We mustn't stand still."

Evidently they had been going round in a circle. Neither river nor woods could be seen—nothing but this field. Almost an hour passed without any cessation of the wind. Suddenly they clearly heard the sighing of pine trees. The wind subsided. In a few minutes Vadim's skis ran into the trunk of a tree. That meant they must have

crossed the river! If they went along the edge of the wood they would be sure to come out on the road.

They were both so exhausted that they could hardly speak. Olga kept stopping more and more frequently, and at last she sat down on the snow under a tree and announced that it was very comfortable there and she wouldn't go another step. She settled herself against the tree trunk with her knees drawn up in front of her. Vadim urged her to get up, but, seeing that his words had no effect, he seized her by the hands and jerked her roughly to her feet. He held her tightly, for she swayed, and her head fell backwards, with closed eyes.

"Olga, darling, we've got to go on. We simply must," he urged in fright. "Do come!"

The snow fell upon her face.

"Why? I don't want to," she said, shaking her head.

"But we must! Pull yourself together." He shook her by the shoulders.

"Yes, I must, I must," she whispered, pushing him away feebly and straightening up. "Let go of me!"

When they had proceeded only a few steps they saw a light in the woods. Far ahead, in the depths of the snow and the darkness, it winked and circled like a winter firefly. "Why should it circle?" thought Vadim, staring at it intently. "I suppose I'm so tired that my eyes are deceiving me. It's probably a lantern hanging on some dacha and swinging in the wind."

But the lantern kept coming closer. A second one appeared beside it. Olga grasped Vadim's hand.

"Oh, it looks as if. . ."

"What?"

"Wait a second." Olga gripped his fingers with unexpected force. "Dad! Andrei!" she called.

Two men's voices answered her out of the darkness. Olga's father reached them first. Vadim made out the tall figure in a sheepskin coat, and the dark beard

covered with snow. The lantern was lifted to light Vadim and Olga.

"A fine pair you are!" he exclaimed. "Two polar bears, eh? Have you lost your senses, Olga?"

"Why?"

"Why? A fellow comes from Moscow to have a little rest, and you drive him through the woods all night. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"We got lost in the snowstorm," said Vadim. "It wasn't Olga's fault. She's exhausted."

Andrei came up and also raised his lantern.

"Don't try to stick up for her," he said testily. "It's just one of her tricks. She could find her way through this wood with her eyes shut. Don't let her fool you."

Olga said nothing, just stood there glumly brushing the snow off her sweater.

"Do you know where you are?" asked her father.

"Of course I do," answered Olga softly. "In the Troitskoye woods."

"Imagine a thing like that! Taking Vadim off to the Troitskoye woods, six kilometres from home! Whatever made you do a thing like that, Olga?"

Olga sighed and raised her head to say haltingly:

"I always wanted to get lost in the woods, and I never could manage it alone."

"Well?"

"Well, Vadim got lost, and I sort of did too. . ."

"Sort of! You deserve a sort of spanking!" said her father. "A grown-up girl, and still up to your school tricks!"

"I never heard of such a thing!" exclaimed Andrei in exasperation. "One of my friends comes to see me, and she. . . Damn it all, haven't you any brains at all, Olga? I'm terribly sorry, Vadim. It's my fault for leaving you alone with her."

Vadim took Andrei's arm as if to say something, and suddenly burst out laughing. It all struck him as so comical—his recent alarms, the scolding in the light of the lanterns, the enraged Andrei, and the distressed Olga, who stood there turning up the snow with her ski stick.

"I never knew you could get so angry, Andrei," he said cheerfully. "Your spectacles are jumping up and down. Hold on to them, or you'll lose them!"

"The bridge of my nose is wet," muttered Andrei, adjusting his glasses. "I wanted to tell you about my new work, to have a talk with you. . . ."

"There's plenty of time, Andrei. Have you left Olga and me any wine?"

"I hope you have!" exclaimed Olga. "We're dying of cold and hunger, and you don't care a bit!"

The room was stiflingly hot. The fine tendrils of ferns cascading from suspended pots swung ceaselessly overhead. Taking out his handkerchief, Vadim mopped his forehead and began fanning his cheeks. The heat had made him dizzy and heavy-eyed. Olga had gone to get blankets for his bed.

"Things should be different in the S.R.S. now," said Andrei from his stool. "I know why it was so dull before. Simply because Kozelsky wanted to turn the meetings of the literary society into something like extension lectures. And all we had to do was to sit back and listen."

"Why can't he stop talking?" wondered Vadim bemusedly. "He really is a queer chap! It's time to go to bed, and he keeps on talking. At least he might choose some other subject!"

Olga came back with a pile of sheets and blankets in her arms. She was wearing an old house dress which she had grown out of. It was so short and tight that her bare brown knees showed, and she could hardly bend :

it. "Here you are!" she said, throwing her burden on the sofa. "This is your pillow—you'll have to change the pillow-case."

She stood watching Vadim as he fumbled with the pillow-case. Her face was flushed, as if she had been sitting in front of the fire, and her eyes were very bright.

"What a helpless creature you are!" she cried, taking the pillow out of his hands. "That's not the way! Turn it inside out!"

He obediently turned the pillow-case inside out.

"Now put your hands inside—inside! That's right! Now grab the corners!"

He grabbed the corners of the pillow-case and stood gazing at her in silence, waiting for the next command.

"Now take hold of the corners of the pillow. For goodness' sake, that isn't so hard, is it? You're as helpless as Andrei!"

He wasn't usually so helpless. Something must have happened to him since morning, he reflected. And though her voice was severe and imperious, her eyes were shining.

"Got it?" She was holding the pillow out to him, and a faint smell of soap came from her slender, bare arms. "Don't stand there staring at me! Hold it! And now pull the pillow-case over it. How is it you can't do such a simple thing?"

"I know how to do everything, Olga," he said smiling. "I've been in the army. But I like to hear you give orders."

"Oh, if that's the case, then good night!"

"Good night!" growled Andrei. "Thanks to you there won't be much of a night. Going to bed at two in the morning!"

"You old grumbler! You go on and on like a coffee grinder."

She stuck her tongue out at her brother and ran out of the room.

The light was turned off. It was very dark outside —no moon, no lights. Snow slipped off the roof with a slight rustle every now and then. Somebody seemed to be tiptoeing about overhead, in the attic perhaps. But that, too, was only the mysterious movements of the snow. There were only five hours left to sleep. At seven sharp they must leave the house; it would be as dark as night, with no one about, and the lights still burning along the road. The first lecture tomorrow was Krechetov's, and they must not be late.

Chapter 22

The literary circle at the plant had been entrusted to Andrei and Vadim. Andrei had conducted the first two meetings held after the midwinter holidays. Vadim had been at both of them, and was to take the next himself.

He was extremely nervous. This work was not in the least like giving practice lessons in school. His listeners would be people of widely-differing ages and background, people who were out of the habit of systematic study and had joined the circle for all sorts of reasons. Some of them were interested in poetry, others in war novels, some had tried writing themselves, some came merely out of curiosity. . . .

Vadim told himself a trifle enviously that it had been easier for Andrei from the very beginning. He had known the plant before, and had many friends among the workers. He was so easy and natural with them! He moved about the room while talking or reading, often interrupting himself to put an unexpected question, or make a joke. Just at first, perhaps, Vadim's presence had put him out a little. But that had quickly passed. Once, when somebody asked a question to which he could not immediately find the answer, Andrei had turned to Vadim and said, without the slightest embarrassment:

"Perhaps you remember, Dima. I seem to have forgotten."

And Vadim, blushing from surprise, and feeling the gaze of twenty pairs of eyes upon him, had got up and given the answer.

Vadim decided to make Mayakovsky the subject of his first talk. He spent three days on preparations as thorough and conscientious as if he were going to read a paper before a learned society. He looked through innumerable books on Mayakovsky, and committed the entire text of his lecture to paper. He kept in mind all the time the necessity for using simple language, not going too deep into theoretical discussion, but placing the main emphasis on Mayakovsky's biography, illustrating the narrative with entertaining anecdotes about his brilliant, witty public appearances, and lightning repartee. "That ought to interest any audience," he told himself. There were about twenty persons in the small reading room when Vadim took his place at the well-lit reading desk. He read his lecture from the manuscript, and hardly saw his audience, unable to force himself to look up for even a second.

The further he read, the more clearly he realized that this first lecture was not turning out a success, that it was, in fact, a complete failure. It sounded so feeble and elementary in his own ears that he wondered how he could have written it. Now he realized that it was precisely those "simple, easily-understood" words which he had so carefully chosen, that made his lecture so feeble. He could hardly bear to go on reading. He attempted to throw out and revise certain passages as he read, but it was impossible to make any fundamental changes, especially since the sense of failure had dulled his mind, making him afraid of diverging in the slightest from what he had written lest he speak sheer nonsense.

So he read on and on, his voice growing ever duller and more monotonous.

His audience seemed to be listening attentively; at any rate the people were very quiet. But Vadim felt that this quietness, this profound stillness pressing down upon him from all sides, was prompted only by politeness. They were listening politely, but not attentively.

He hoped matters would improve when he reached the part about Mayakovsky's public appearances. He had left all the poet's withering epigrams, apt puns, witticisms and anecdotes for the end. When he reached them he thought, almost in despair: "If *they* don't save me, nothing will—I'm lost."

And he launched on this part of his lecture. His listeners were as silent as ever. But gradually they became more animated: they shifted in their chairs, whispered, someone laughed, someone else coughed, and again there was a suggestion of a laugh. But that was all. Vadim, who by this time was inwardly fuming, thought indignantly: "What's the matter, haven't they any sense of humour? Don't they know how to laugh? If they don't react to this, how can they be expected to react to anything?" Involuntarily he raised his eyes, and for the first time he saw his listeners. They were smiling courteously, and suddenly Vadim realized that there was nothing wrong with their sense of humour, it was simply that there was nothing new in what he was telling them. It was all familiar to them, as familiar perhaps as it was to Vadim himself.

Stunned by this realization, he hastily brought the lecture to a close and announced an interval.

Everyone immediately got up noisily, as if in relief. Vadim sat down and took out a cigarette. He was approached by Musya, the dispatcher for whom he had drawn the caricature.

"You're terribly serious tonight, Vadim Petrovich," she said, her eyes laughing. "I hardly recognize you."

Vadim, who suspected that she was making fun of him, and perhaps even trying to show off her intimacy with him in front of the others, answered coldly:

"I've come to work, and not for amusement, Musya. Have you any questions?"

"Questions? Oh no!" she shook her head and walked away. At once he realized how foolish his attitude had been; after such a wretched lecture any show of authority must seem out of place, if not ridiculous. Ever afterwards he blushed with shame when he recalled this conversation with Musya.

On the whole, he did many stupid things that first day. During the lecture a heavy-set man in blue overalls—probably a technologist or a constructor—took out a cigarette and asked in a deep bass voice: "May I smoke?" After a moment's hesitation, Vadim said: "No, only during the interval." Why should he have said such a thing? To make himself sound important? But why should he try to sound important, when he had bungled the only thing that really mattered—his lecture?

A short, heavy-browed youth with a determined scowl on his face came up to the table where Vadim was sitting. He leaned on the table with both hands, and Vadim observed that they were large, muscular, with flat turned-up thumbs, the sort of hands a middle-aged fitter might have.

"I should like to ask you a question, Vadim Petrovich," said the youth in slow, sure tones. "Which of our contemporary poets are continuing the Mayakovsky tradition?"

"None of them!" The high, boyish voice belonged to Valya Batukin: he was the poet of the plant, as Vadim had learned during Andrei's sessions with the circle. Batukin was an eighteen-year-old lad with a high forehead and freckled face.

"You're wrong there," said Vadim. "On the whole, all Soviet poetry follows the tradition set by Mayakovsky."

"Maybe the poetry does, but the poets don't," laughed Batukin.

"What do you mean by that?" asked someone.

"I mean they don't want to learn from Mayakovsky. They're still 'pouring their verse out of the same old watering pots.'"

"What about Nedogonov's 'Flag Over the Village Soviet'? Is that out of a watering pot too?" asked Musya indignantly.

"I haven't read it yet."

"What *have* you read?"

"Valya only reads his own poetry," laughed someone.

"I may have read less than some of you, but I understand more."

"I think you're wrong, Batukin," said Vadim, getting up. He felt the sudden surge of energy and self-confidence which the anticipation of an argument usually brought. "Mayakovsky contributed new ideas and themes, and the revolutionary spirit, to poetry. That is what is meant by the Mayakovsky tradition. But sit down, comrades. The interval is over, and we'll take up your questions in proper order."

But it was not easy to establish any order at all. Vadim made no particular effort to do so. He found himself thoroughly engrossed in the argument which had sprung up so spontaneously during the interval, enabling him to shake off his oppressive sense of defeat.

Batukin pitted his high, boyish voice against the deep bass of the stocky fitter, whose name was Balashov. One by one the circle members got up to speak—grown workmen, young learners, boys and girls, who recited poetry by heart and kept interrupting one another in the ardour of their argument. Vadim began interrupting too, and for the first time in his life recited poetry in public. He forgot

all about his shyness, the false importance he had assumed at the beginning of the meeting, and his ill-starred lecture. He argued hotly and stubbornly in defence of his point of view, as he was accustomed to argue among his friends in the corridors of the Institute, or at sessions of the S.R.S.

He was no longer sitting at the table, but, like Andrei, was pacing the floor, smoking one cigarette after another. When the events of the entire day suddenly flashed before him in an illuminating instant, he realized that the failure of his lecture was due to the fact that he had misunderstood his audience. The people sitting before him—these fitters and mechanics, these lorry drivers and operators of milling machines—read the same books he did, were interested in the same things, and no doubt frequented the same libraries. He came across them in museums and art galleries and sat next to them at the theatre. Many of them were studying in evening schools, while some were probably students like himself, taking night courses at institutes. Vadim felt happy and at ease now that he had really made their acquaintance, albeit at the cost of his own initial failure and of some very bitter moments.

Vadim suggested that some of them should read what they had themselves written. Batukin was the first to volunteer. He showed no sign of embarrassment as he recited his poems. They were very youthful, naive poems; one of them was called "Our Shop," and began:

*Here our electric drills
Sing enchanting trills,
The hammers play
The drums all day,
And the files are never still!*

The audience listened attentively. Then began the criticism.

"I like to read poetry when I'm in the dumps," said one of the girls, "if it's sad, it fits my mood, and if it's gay it pulls me out of it. But Valya's poems are neither sad nor gay. They're mere jingles. They rhyme, but they have no meaning. I think poetry ought to have meaning."

"So do I," retorted Batukin. "But you can't say a poem has no meaning just because you don't understand what it means."

"Well, what does your poem mean?"

"It means—" He waved his arms ineffectually. "It tells about the shop in general—describes it—"

Vadim stopped him:

"You'll have the last word, Batukin."

Fitter Balashov rose and said energetically:

"Batukin obviously has talent. But so far his poems are just so much spottage. What he writes has rhyme, but not much reason. Show me a shop that has both pneumatic hammers and milling machines in it! And what makes him think the drills sing trills? Or that the files are never still?"

"Don't quibble over words," said Batukin, colouring. "Anyone can criticize, but try writing something yourself!"

"I don't intend trying, but I've read plenty of poetry in my time and understand a thing or two."

"It's chisels you understand."

"I understand chisels too," said Balashov, bristling. "And you, famous poet that you are, have stopped turning out your shop quota. Last week you toed the mark, but this week you're falling behind again."

"Perhaps I'm thinking of taking up something else," muttered Batukin.

He was referring to his intention of joining the staff of the plant's newspaper.

He gazed at Vadim in tense expectation, as if hoping he would come to his defence, and Vadim realized that

he must not support Balashov at this moment, however fair his criticism was. He felt that the young poet must be encouraged by serious advice.

"It's very difficult to write good poetry," began Vadim after a thoughtful pause. "Even the most talented poets have found this to be true. Your comrades were right in saying there is no such thing as 'general' description. There can be no 'shop in general.' In poetry, everything must be specific and exact. And the most important thing is not catchy rhyme, but profound and interesting ideas. The rhyme must spring from the ideas. But I'm sure Batukin is capable of writing poetry. And real poetry!" Vadim suddenly got up and brought his hand down on the desk for emphasis. "Just see how well he described the young fitter in the poem, 'The Night Shift.'" Vadim recited by heart one of the quatrains.

"That's awfully good," said someone, almost in surprise.

"I agree with you there," said Balashov.

Everyone smiled and looked at Batukin, who blushed happily and hung his head. And Vadim was pleasantly conscious of having won a tiny pedagogical victory.

It was getting late, and he suggested closing the meeting. A few of the members got up and left, but the majority wanted to hear another author, Shamarov, a strapping young electrician, read his works. He had a ruddy, pleasant face and such fair hair that it looked quite white in the electric light. He read the only story he had ever written—a war story, very short and simple, more like reportage than fiction. It was about two friends at the front, both of them scouts, who were sent behind the German lines to bring back a "tongue." They seized a German officer, and, after throwing their pursuers off their trail, dragged him back to their unit. They had to cross a river on the way; twice the German tried to drown himself, but both times they saved him, even administer-

ing artificial respiration after the second attempt. Thus they fulfilled their assignment. That was the title of the story: "The Assignment."

"Is it a true story?" asked Vadim.

"I suppose you can call it that," said Shamarov. He spoke softly, mumbling his words, and wiping the perspiration from his brow with a large handkerchief. Vadim liked him at once, and he liked his simple, unpretentious story, too.

"That's not the way you told it before, Semyon," said someone in the audience.

"How did he tell it before?" asked Vadim.

"It's all the same," muttered Shamarov with a scowl.

"I should like to hear how it really happened. Perhaps you don't want to tell us?"

"What's there to tell?" said Shamarov deprecatingly, but after a moment's hesitation he began to speak in his mumbling way: "When we were crossing the river they opened fire on us and sent up a flare. My friend, Nikolai, said we'd better get rid of this Fritz and dive off in the opposite direction. Of course we couldn't do any fast swimming with that German in tow. I said we'd better stick it, but he got scared and made off on his own. That's when they got him. He called for help—said he was drowning. But how could I help him? I had all I could do to hang on to that devil, and I had no right to let him go. Well—the rest is just how I've written it."

"And what about Nikolai?" gasped Musya. "Was he drowned?"

"Yes," said Shamarov, staring at her. Presently he added: "But I couldn't very well write that. Major Yershov, our commander, said I did the right thing, but even so I couldn't get myself to put it down on paper."

"I think you ought to have written it just as it happened," said Vadim excitedly. "It would have been a true

narrative about a soldier's duty. After all, Nikolai lost his nerve and abandoned you, didn't he?"

"Lost his nerve? You could lose your mind, let alone your nerve, in a fix like that—them shooting at you as if you were a wild duck, and nothing for you to take cover under. No, it wasn't a matter of nerve—it was. . ."

"But that wasn't how you felt, was it?"

"Yes. But I couldn't express it in words. It was awful. That glaring light, and we had nowhere to hide. . . . For two years Nikolai and I had been like brothers."

He dropped his head and fell silent, and no one spoke. The talk had leaped the bounds of literary discussion so suddenly that Vadim was at a loss.

"Write it over again the way it really was," said Balashov.

Shamarov shook his head.

"No," he said. "I won't write it over. I wrote just what I wanted to write," he added with quiet resolution.

Vadim realized it would be futile and unwise to try to persuade him. The man standing before him had no intention of ever becoming a writer. He had merely made a written record of something that might have happened, something he wished had happened.

"Would you like to write? Do you want to learn?" asked Vadim.

"Learn to write?" repeated Shamarov with an uncertain little laugh. "You can learn how to insulate electric wires, but how can you learn to write? However much you study, if you haven't got genius, nothing will come of it. Genius or talent—one or the other. Take Maximov—" nodding toward one of the younger lads—"he'll draw anything you like, but I couldn't draw a straight line if my life depended on it."

When the circle broke up at about eleven o'clock, Balashov came up and thanked Vadim on behalf of all the members. They surrounded him, asking who was to

lead the next meeting and what the subject of discussion would be. Vadim was happy: he felt that they had enjoyed the evening, in spite of its unfortunate beginning. And he longed to assure them that his next lecture would be quite different—much better and more interesting.

"I'm afraid the lecture wasn't much of a success," he said with a wry smile. "But the first time doesn't count, does it? I hope you'll find my next one better."

The young people, smiling with sympathy and understanding, hastened to reassure him.

"Oh, it was very nice, Vadim Petrovich!"

"It's only natural. . . ."

"Of course!"

"All right," said Vadim with a little laugh of relief. "Let's leave it at that."

They all went out of the building together and said good-bye at the gate. Igor Sotnikov, the youngest member of the circle, was going Vadim's way, to the Metro. He walked on silent and aloof, apparently too shy to begin the conversation. So Vadim began questioning him about himself, and learned that he was nearly sixteen, had just finished vocational school and was now operating a milling machine. He was also attending evening school. Vadim discovered that Igor loved scientific adventure stories more than any other sort of literature and had been greatly impressed by H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*.

"I couldn't fall asleep all night after I read it," said Igor enthusiastically. "Wouldn't it be fine to build such a machine?"

"Where would you go in it?" asked Vadim.

"Not very far at first—just about three years ahead, to see what things would be like at the end of this five-year plan."

"A modest wish."

"I suppose so, but awfully interesting. We live out of town, along the Paveletsky line. I heard a lecture about

what our little settlement is to be like at the end of the five-year plan—it's to become a full-sized town, with a new theatre, two cinema houses, and a sports stadium seating five thousand. And a new bridge, too. Parks and trees and things—I don't count them. The best thing is the stadium. After having a look three years ahead, I'd take a trip into the era of communism."

"I suppose if you once landed there, you'd never want to come back," said Vadim with a smile.

"Oh, yes I would," said Igor gravely. "For one thing, I've got a mother and a sister living in the era of socialism; besides, how could I leave with such an intense struggle going on in the world? I have to do my share, don't I?"

"Of course, you do," acquiesced Vadim. "We want to build communism with our own hands, and not have it served up to us on a silver platter."

"Of course," nodded Igor. Then, after a short pause: "Joking apart, I really did enjoy *The Time Machine*; it's so well written. That's the kind of book I like—full of imagination, but written so you believe it all, every word. Of course when you've finished you realize how fantastic it was, but that doesn't matter."

They had already descended the escalator and were walking along the underground platform. As usual at this hour, there were not many passengers; the rush hour was long over, and it was still too early for people to be coming back from concerts and theatres. A few individuals were walking up and down the marble platform or sitting on the polished benches. A neat, pretty girl in a red uniform cap was walking slowly along the very edge of the platform, intent on the new shoes she was wearing.

"H. G. Wells was certainly a talented writer," said Vadim. "But I'm afraid his 'time machine' won't take you very far. It seems to go backward, instead of forward. He

attempted to plunge hundreds of years into the future, but he couldn't see ten years ahead. He never believed we could build a Metro—considered such a job too stiff for us Bolsheviks. But we did it. Even within his lifetime. And the finest Metro in the world."

"Didn't he really believe it?" asked Igor, looking at Vadim incredulously, and almost exulting. "Think of that! I didn't know. But I had a feeling myself that he was moving backwards instead of forwards in that machine of his. He should have arrived at communism, but instead his machine brought him to a sort of second-rate copy of ancient Greece. Which reminds me!" said Igor with a gasp. "I should have gone home early to study history tonight—we have an exam the day after tomorrow."

Raya Volkova and Valya Gruzina had been friends for a year and a half.

Valya had graduated from medical school in the previous year, and was now working in one of the Moscow clinics. She was a quiet, earnest girl, deeply interested in books, music, and the theatre. She and Raya did not meet often, but whenever they did they took care to do something worth while. Sometimes they went out of town, to Arkhangelskoye or Muranovo, to walk through the green meadows in spring, or along the moist, leaf-cushioned paths in autumn. In the winter Valya would sometimes say: "Let's go out to the Lenin Hills to get a night view of Moscow." And they would get on a bus and ride far out, getting off on the empty highway in the dark shadow of the ski jump, there to stand gazing down on the sea of lights—so huge, so surging and unquiet. They spoke of all sorts of things, but mostly of people. Never did they become bored with each other.

Sometimes Raya would invite her friend to attend institute affairs, but for some reason Valya always found

a pretext for not coming. Raya put this down to her friend's shyness.

Soon after returning from the ski run, Raya went to see Valya and tell her all about their adventures. The Gruzinovs had two rooms in a large, communal apartment. Valya's father was a mechanic at the Ducat Cigarette Factory, where her mother worked as a technical inspector.

The door was opened by Valya's mother, a short, plump woman with heavy eyebrows. She seemed a little startled on seeing Raya, and half-closed the door to call out, with a Lettish accent: "Valya! Someone to see you!" Then she opened the door again and invited Raya in. From the other room came the sound of voices raised in argument.

"The swine! He'll get what's coming to him; I'll see to that!" It was a man's voice, raised in anger.

"Do stop, father! There's no sense going on this way," said Valya in trembling tones.

"Where did he learn such tricks? The dirty scoundrel!"

Valya came quickly into the room where Raya was waiting. She was deathly pale and there was an almost frantic look in her nearsighted eyes.

"What's the matter?" asked Raya anxiously, taking her friend by the hand.

"Nothing special. I'm rather tired, that's all," Valya gave a little toss of her head and forced herself to smile. "You're looking wonderful! So pretty and rosy! Was it the ski trip did you so much good?"

"I suppose so. It was great fun. But I can't say you're looking so well."

"We'll talk about me later. When did you get back? Tell me all about it, Raya. Was it fun?"

Raya spoke at length, but without enthusiasm, sensing that she had come at an awkward moment and that

her presence was being tolerated out of mere politeness. Valya listened with an abstracted air, mechanically asking questions, and making brief comments. When Raya said it was time for her to go, Valya made the usual protests.

"Must you really? It's been so interesting to listen to you!"

Raya could see that her friend was deeply distressed, and she felt that Valya would have liked to confide in her, but couldn't bring herself to. Raya didn't like to ask any questions, especially as Valya's silent mother sat in the room like a sentry.

When Raya and Valya were saying good-bye to each other in the hall, Raya said:

"I'd love you to come to an affair we're having at the Institute next week, but I know you won't!"

"What's the occasion?"

"Sergei Palavin, one of our students, is going to read us a novel he has written. Do come, just this once. You'll see Pyotr and the rest of our crowd."

"Perhaps I will," said Valya unexpectedly.

"Really! I'll be awfully glad," said Raya, giving her friend a little hug. "I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

"Isn't Palavin the one who got the honorary scholarship?"

"Yes, he's awfully clever. The evening should be interesting. Lots of the students will speak. And I'll introduce you to Pyotr."

"That Palavin seems to be the pride of the Institute—a kind of demigod, isn't he?"

"Why are you so interested in him?" laughed Raya. "I promise you will enjoy it!"

Valya gave Raya a swift, keen glance.

"Because—did you hear my father shouting at me? It was all on account of Palavin."

"Palavin? Sergei Palavin?"

"I can't tell you any more just now. Later I will," said Valya hurriedly. "And I'm not sure I'll go to your affair. Do you know a boy named Vadim Belov?"

"Of course."

"Please ask him to come and see me. Only not here. At the clinic; he knows where that is. Ask him to call me up first."

"All right," nodded Raya. "Only..."

"I can't tell you anything more just now," said Valya, taking her friend by the shoulders and looking deep into her eyes. "I must speak to Vadim first. You'll find out everything later on. Not that there's anything worth knowing." She gave a weary little wave of her hand. "It's all very commonplace. Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Raya softly.

Before lectures began the next day, Raya met Vadim in the vestibule.

"Do you know Valya Gruzinova?" she asked.

"Yes," said Vadim.

"She wants you to call her up and arrange to see her at the clinic," said Raya. "As soon as possible."

Valya had not said it was urgent, but Raya supposed it must be. She felt that Vadim could help Valya, and that the sooner he did so, the better.

"All right, I'll give her a call," said Vadim in some surprise. "Have you any idea what she wants?"

"No, but I think it has something to do with Palavin. Don't you know about it?"

Vadim shrugged his shoulders.

"I first met Valya—" began Raya hesitantly, then, suddenly changing her mind, she said: "Call her up, Vadim. Don't forget!" and walked away.

Vadim turned to see Palavin standing beside him. He looked as if he had not slept for three nights, or as if there was something preying on his mind.

"Hullo, Vadim," he said. "Why did she turn tail so suddenly? Talking about me?"

He had a strange intuitiveness, a supersensitivity that informed him whenever his name came under discussion. More than once when Vadim had spoken about him to someone sitting beside him in the large lecture hall, he had suddenly become aware of Palavin's eyes fixed on him across the long rows of seats. Each time this happened Vadim received an unpleasant shock.

*"No, not about you particularly," said Vadim.

"Listen, I want to ask you something—let's sit down somewhere. The other day poor old Kozelsky called me up. You'll never guess what for," said Sergei with a little laugh.

"What for?"

"He asked for a written recommendation based on his work with the S.R.S. He wants to use it as evidence in his favour somewhere else where he thinks he's going to be attacked—an Institute, or Ministry, or some such place. In a word, I am expected to make up an apology for Kozelsky and get people to sign it. How do you like that?"

"Go ahead!"

"Looks to me like the old boy's been scared clean out of his wits. Can you imagine anything so presumptuous? Naturally I refused—said I was ill and couldn't leave the house. He understood—after all, the man's no fool. Apologized, wished me well, and hung up. Now what do you think of that?"

Palavin laughed heartily, apparently expecting Vadim to join in.

"Is that all you wanted to tell me?" asked Vadim after a moment's pause.

"No, that's just a minor item." Palavin affected a cough. "I wanted to ask you for your extracts from Kozelsky's lectures and Nina Fokina's notes."

"What for?"

"I'm thinking of speaking at the open meeting of the Council of Studies."

"About Kozelsky?"

"Yes. A sort of post-mortem. About formalism and cosmopolitanism in general. In March."

"I know. I intend to speak myself."

"You? What for?" asked Palavin in surprise. "Kozelsky's been given the sack. Everything's over. You're only interested in one little phase of the subject, while I mean to make broad generalizations, based on material from all the latest papers."

"Well, I'm not going to give you my notes," said Vadim brusquely. "What right have you to speak against Kozelsky?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You stuck up for him at our meetings and at the S.R.S. He's the one who got you your honorary scholarship."

"*He* got it for me?"

"At least he helped you get it."

"Listen, I was awarded the scholarship in February, when his goose was already cooked, you fool!"

"I've been a fool long enough!"

They both jumped to their feet and stood confronting each other as if about to fight.

"You must be crazy," said Palavin, laughing nervously.

"I'm sick and tired of your somersaulting—get that into your head!" said Vadim furiously. "When you needed Kozelsky, you danced before him on your hind legs. Now that he's down, you make a point of kicking him—in order to further your own cause."

"Do you want the whole Institute to hear you?" whispered Palavin angrily. "I have more right to speak than you have!"

—
“You have no right at all!”

“More, I tell you!” repeated Palavin. “You just go around talking big, acting the noble Don Quixote, while I turn out work.”

“You can work hard, when it’s for yourself, for your own benefit.”

Palavin fixed Vadim with his eye.

“You’ll be sorry for those words, Belov,” he said quietly and turned away without looking back.

Vadim stood gazing after him, his fists clenched, a nervous smile on his lips. But he was filled with a sudden, inexplicable sense of relief.

Chapter 23

Lena Medovskaya did not attend lectures for two days. No one knew why she was absent. When at last she appeared, she announced that she had been helping her family move into a new flat.

She invited Vadim to a housewarming that evening. The grownups had had their party the night before, and this evening the guests were to be Lena’s. She had invited only three students from the Institute: Vadim, Sergei Palavin, and Max Vilkin. She didn’t want to invite others “because it’s always the same old crowd, and the nicest people get on your nerves if you see them too often.” There was to be a boy named Garik who studied at the Conservatory, another from the Theatre Institute, some of Lena’s school friends, and her cousin.

Lena went on naming her guests and describing people Vadim had never met. He was not very attentive. Of late their relations had been so casual as they had been in their first year at the Institute when they had just made each other’s acquaintance. This seemed to suit both of them. Vadim did not bother to ask Lena why she had not met him at the Byelorussian Station that morning.

Lena herself hastened to explain that her mother had forbidden her to go at the last minute because she had only just recovered from the flu. Lena apologized in plaintive tones, and Vadim easily forgave her; it no longer meant anything to him.

Vadim considered her invitation with the same sober detachment. He knew very well why she had invited only three boys—she wanted this to be a gathering of admirers, a bouquet of suitors. Well, let her have her fun. It would be amusing to watch, and especially to see how Palavin looked in that bouquet. Perhaps Vadim would go, and perhaps he wouldn't.

"I can't promise, Lena," he said. "If I have time, I'll come. There's to be an important meeting at the plant tonight."

"Oh, that old plant again!" said Lena fretfully. "Do try to come, Vadim, I'll be expecting you."

She gave him the address; their telephone had not yet been connected.

That evening the literary circle met at the headquarters of the Komsomol Committee. Everyone was deeply interested in the question under discussion—the issuing of a Komsomol magazine. They decided, without any argument, to call it the *Rezets*.^{*} But a great deal of argument rose about the question whether the magazine was to be purely literary, or whether it was to print articles on production as well.

"If it's to be a factory magazine, it must treat of factory problems," said Balashov with a vigorous wave of his hand. "In other words, like any other shop, it must serve the factory's five-year plan."

"Do we want to turn it into another plant newspaper?" asked Valya Batukin. "We've got one, and that's enough. We won't be able to compete."

* Chisel.

When the argument was at its height, the editor of the plant paper entered the room.

"I've brought you some material for your first issue," he said, taking an envelope out of his pocket. "It was sent to our paper. Read it and see what you think of it."

Balashov began to read the letter out loud. It had been written by a young foundryman named Solokhin. He had invented a means of forging six machine parts simultaneously, thereby trebling the speed of output. The Invention Bureau had been very high-handed about the proposition, shelving it as impracticable without proper investigation. The forge shop technologist, on the other hand, recommended it highly, considering it perfectly practicable.

"What do *you* think about it, Valya?" asked Balashov. "Are we to publish such things, or keep all our space for your 'irilling drills'?"

"Of course we ought to publish it," consented Balukin with a frown. "But first we must look into the matter. We can't accept things in an offhand way like this."

It was decided to send someone to the forge shop to speak to Solokhin, who was working on the second shift. Vadim, who had never been to the forge shop, offered to go with Balashov.

The moment he entered he was deafened by an all-pervading din. The room was filled with the odour of steam and red-hot metal. Huge pneumatic hammers and gigantic presses, like prehistoric monsters, lined either side of the vast room, shaking the floor with their thunder. Red reflections flashed from their metal joints, and the men standing beside them looked like valiant Liliputs.

Vadim saw a workman in overalls take an orange-hued, fire-breathing ingot in a pair of tongs and place it beneath a pneumatic hammer. At the pressure of the man's foot on a pedal, the hammer began to flatten out the

ingot; whenever the man relaxed the pressure of his foot, the blunt nose of the hammer hung in mid-air, as if taking aim before once more pounding away with systematic precision. At first the ingot spat out sparks of fury, but soon its temper cooled, its complexion changed, and it assumed the required form. The man picked it up again with the tongs and tossed it on to a pile of forgings aglow with the rich coppery sheen of a pheasant's wing.

Solokhin, who was just finishing a job, was standing with his feet apart, leaning over the ingot he held in his tongs. At every blow of the hammer his arms jerked and his mouth twisted.

When at last he came over to greet his visitors, Vadim saw that his lean face was wet with perspiration and his hair plastered to his forehead in moist brown curls. Solokhin was glad to hear that the Komsomol Committee was willing to help him, and brought out a model of his invention to show them.

"I'm going to speak to the Chief Engineer tomorrow," he said. "I'll make that Invention Bureau accept my proposition if I have to squeeze the guts out of them! I'm that sort—once I make up my mind to a thing, wild horses can't stop me. It's do or die!"

"Good! You go tomorrow, and we'll go today," said Balashov. "We'll start things moving. I promise you that. Come along, Vadim Petrovich."

At the offices of the Invention Bureau they found a middle-aged, baldish engineer sitting at a table colouring a diagram. They said they had been sent by the *Rezets* to find out about Solokhin's invention. The engineer seemed a bit disconcerted. Never having heard of such a magazine, he assumed that it was a technical journal.

"You see, comrades," he began, clearing his throat and staring at the floor, "Solokhin can hardly be called an inventor. He's just a foundryman, though not without ability. Such people certainly deserve all the encouragement

we can give them. I can well understand your interest in him. But this is how matters stand—"

And the engineer, still staring at the floor, launched upon a lengthy and monotonous description of Solokhin's invention. He did not deny that there was something in it, but the idea had not been sufficiently worked out. The Invention Bureau had not rejected the proposition outright, of course, but since all its departments were busy re-equipping Shop 5, there was no time to work on Solokhin's proposition at present.

"You might at least have returned a favourable verdict," said Balashov, gazing glumly at the diagram. "Have you given any at all?"

"Yes, indeed," said the engineer, rummaging in the drawer, and extracting a sheet of paper. "Here it is. Just a rough draught. Quite cursory, of course."

He handed it to Vadim, who read it aloud:

"The proposed appliance for forging machine parts would not, in its present form, make for efficiency. This could be achieved only by introducing fundamental technical improvements. The basic idea offers certain advantages, although on the whole it is not new.' Is that what you call a favourable verdict?"

"More or less. You haven't seen our opinions on other inventions, you know."

"One thing we have seen," said Balashov. "Solokhin was right in calling you bureaucrats. There he is, racking his brains to find means of increasing production, and you dismiss his ideas with a flip of your hand, as if they were of no importance whatever. The Komsomol organization isn't going to allow that sort of thing."

The engineer lifted his brows in surprise.

"May I ask what Komsomol organization you are referring to?"

"The Komsomol organization at our plant. It will not allow it, you can take my word for that!"

"I thought you came from some magazine?"

"We do! The Komsomol magazine, *Rezets*. The first number will be out in a few days and you will be able to read about yourselves in it. We shall support Solokhin."

The engineer seemed relieved. He leaned back in his chair and even smiled.

"And here was I thinking—humph! Why did you fellows try to fool me like that?" he said, briskly rubbing his handkerchief over his bald pate. Presently he drew his chair up to the table and picked up his brush, saying in changed tones: "Well, my friends, that's how matters stand. And there's nothing I can do about it."

"Nothing, you say?"

"Nothing whatever. I've explained to you over and over again: Director's orders; departments are overworked. You can write as much as you like, but it won't change anything. You'll only make fools of yourselves in your very first issue. And that's that!"

He gave his brush a shake, removed a hair from the tip, and returned to his diagram.

"We'll see who's going to make fools of themselves," said Balashov threateningly. "We'll go straight to the Director!"

"Just as you like," said the engineer. "That's your business."

"The complacent old duffer, sitting there puttering over his drawings," said Balashov indignantly when they were outside. "The old diehard!"

They headed for the plant administration offices. The secretary informed them that the Director had been called to the Ministry and would not be back that day. Deeply annoyed, they returned to Komsomol headquarters, where they found only Kuznetsov, all the circle members having gone home. When Balashov had given an account of their visit to the Invention Bureau, Kuznetsov said that he would go to the Director himself the following day.

"Too bad Anatoli Stepanovich has gone to work for the Ministry," said Balashov with a sigh. "We could always talk to him, but I don't know about this new one."

"Who was Anatoli Stepanovich?"

"Our former Director. He left the plant this month. The new one was sent here from another plant—a man named Medovsky."

"Medovsky?" said Vadim, alert. "What's his first name and patronymic?"

"Konstantin Ivanovich. He looks rather formidable."

"Could he be Lena's father?" thought Vadim. "Her name is Elena Konstantinovna, and her father's a well-known engineer. It's quite possible."

He glanced at the clock. Twenty past nine. Should he go straight to her house, without going home? Just as he was, with his brief case? Yes, he would. It might even be a good thing.

Vadim ascended to the fifth floor in a lift still smelling of fresh paint. As soon as he stepped out on to the landing he heard the sounds of a piano and a hum of voices. He rang the bell and someone came running down the hall to open the door. It was Lena, in a long evening dress. She was gleaming from head to foot—her dress gleamed, her slippers gleamed, the garnet brooch at her breast gleamed, and so did her brown eyes and her bright, moist lips.

"Vadim! At last! What kept you so long?" she cried, reaching impetuously for his hat and brief case. "Take off your coat. Nowhere to hang it? Squeeze it in between the others—here! We waited and waited—thought you were never coming!"

Stepping closer, she whispered:

"Why didn't you change?"

"I came straight from the plant without going home .

"Never mind! Come along."

She took his arm and drew him down the hall to a large room where some twelve guests were seated round a table. It did not look as if they had waited very long for Vadim before beginning to eat. The supper was over. One of the guests was playing the piano and the rest were talking animatedly, with the air of people who have just supped heartily. The men were smoking, the women nibbling sweets.

Lena introduced Vadim:

"Vadim Belov—also a future pedagogue, and our mutual friend."

"Our Mutual Friend, tantalizing us with Great Expectations," put in Max Vilkin, waving his hand to Vadim, and smiling.

Everyone laughed approvingly.

"Vadim is an old friend of Sergei Palavin, by the way. They've been friends since childhood, and schoolmates," said Lena, but Palavin ignored her words and went on talking to his neighbour.

"Yes, schoolmates," said Vadim, just for the sake of saying something.

Smiling radiantly, Albina Trofimovna asked Vadim to the table. He was made to drink a "penalty" glass of wine. Albina Trofimovna fussed round him, offering him all sorts of delicacies. By this time the guests had left the table, and Vadim felt embarrassed. When he had swallowed a mouthful of something and gulped down some more wine, he got up and went over to Max.

"What's the matter, old man? Nobody to play chess with?"

Max thrust out his lip contemptuously.

"Chess and wine? Nonsense! I'm just observing..."

Vadim, too, began observing. There were two men he did not know—the long-promised Garik from the Conservatory, a soft-spoken young man who called Lena re-

spectfully Elena Konstantinovna, and Lena's cousin, smart young Air Force lieutenant, who sat on the sofa looking bored and smoking one cigarette after another. The girls present did not strike Vadim as interesting in the least, at any rate at first glance. Lena was the only really beautiful one among them.

Palavin was surrounded by girls, whom he was entertaining with quotations from his skits, to the accompaniment of laughter and applause. Someone started a gramophone, but the record revolved in vain, nobody seemed to want to dance. . . . Vadim certainly did not. He was longing to know if Lena's father was at home.

Lena offered to show him the flat. He walked about the spacious rooms, with their freshly polished parquet floors smelling of wax, and the furniture, what there was of it, carefully set against the walls, the way it always is when people move into big new flats. He nodded mechanically to Lena's animated explanations without giving his mind to what she was saying. She made him open built-in cupboards, turn keys in the ingenious locks of the doors, tug at the cords of the ventilation panes, to show how easily and noiselessly they opened, turn on the hot water in the bathroom and even throw a cigarette butt into the trash chute in the kitchen.

It was certainly a splendid flat, but Vadim wanted to know where the master of the house was. At last Lena opened a door a crack, and Vadim caught sight of a desk with a green table lamp on it and bookcases from which gleamed gilded bindings.

"And that's Daddy's study," said Lena, closing the door. Vadim interpreted this to mean: "Dad's not at home," and it was on the tip of his tongue to say: "When's he coming home, then?"

Suddenly the whole evening seemed to him hollow. He felt tired and made up his mind to go home soon. If Medovsky did not come in half an hour he would go home

When Vadim got back to the dining room things were still just as they had been when he left it. The records were still spinning futilely, the Air Force lieutenant lazily changing one after another without rising from the sofa; Sergei Palavin was still holding forth to amuse the guests. Seated in careless ease in an armchair and gesticulating with his pipestem, he was regaling his hearers with all sorts of stories, funny cases from institute life, and imitations of professors. Whatever turn the conversation took, he instantly joined in it, attracting general attention and giving his opinions wittily, weightily, and dogmatically, as if his were the final word.

Vadim watched him with an ever-growing feeling of hostility. All these witticisms and stories struck him as vulgar and second-rate, for he knew them by heart and was sick of them, but here they were apparently new, and Palavin's feminine hearers received them with ecstatic squeals.

At last Albina Trofimovna saw that it was not quite the thing to let Palavin monopolize the conversation, leaving the other young men in the shade. They could not hold a candle to him, of course, but the laws of hospitality must be observed. Profiting by a pause during which Palavin filled his pipe, she gracefully changed the subject:

"By the way, Sergei was talking about art. Have any of you seen the portrait Garik did of Lena?"

Nobody had, and all expressed an immediate desire to see it.

"Albina Trofimovna! Please don't!" exclaimed Garik in imploring tones. "It isn't finished, it's just a sketch. You shouldn't, really!"

But Albina Trofimovna was inexorable and instantly brought in from the next room a framed ink drawing of Lena.

"Awfully good, isn't it?" she said, holding the portrait under the lamp. "Especially the lower part of the face. Isn't it good?" Everyone nodded, and Palavin said in authoritative tones: "Not bad. One can see, of course, that it's not finished."

"Lena's much better looking in real life," said the silent airman, rising from the sofa for the first time the whole evening.

"Of course, Nikolai," smiled Albina Trofimovna. "After all, real life is always best, isn't it?"

And everyone agreed with Albina Trofimovna, and smiled, too. Glancing at the artist who was standing aside, blushing miserably and biting his lower lip, Vadim told himself that he must be quite a decent chap.

"We have so much talent represented here," said Albina Trofimovna. "Sergei writes, Garik's a musician and an artist, Vadim's going to be a scholar. . ."

"Vadim draws awfully well, too," said Lena. "Perhaps even better than Garik!"

"Splendid! Tasya dances, Lena sings a little. I hear Max is an enthusiastic checkers player. And Nikolai an athlete, a boxer. . ."

"Not a boxer, a wrestler, Auntie," said the airman, laughing. "You don't know a thing about sport!"

"How should I, Nikolai? Anyhow, this is a regular Olympus, gathering-ground of the Muses, isn't it? We could get up wonderful parties. Our flat is completely at your disposal—do what you like, no one will interfere with you. Lena's father's at work from morning to night."

"That's obvious," thought Vadim.

"...and anyhow he wouldn't mind a bit. He's very fond of young people. Really he is! You could get up a literary evening. Sergei could read his poems and plays. . ."

"It's a novel he's writing, Mamma!"

"All the better. Novels are still easier to take in than plays are. How interesting! People ought to be able to amuse themselves. Surely one can have a lot of fun without drinking!"

"Albina Trofimovna," exclaimed Palavin in mock horror. "We never touch liquor!"

"I know all about that, Sergei," said Albina Trofimovna significantly. "I have had occasion to draw my own conclusions. Well—don't you like my suggestion?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all for it," said Palavin. "Max, the checkers champion, can give a demonstration of simultaneous play, Belov can tell us all about the sentimental school in Russian literature. I'm all for it. What about you, girls?"

The girls laughed and said they too were "for" it. Albina Trofimovna shook her finger at Palavin.

"Stop making fun of everything, Sergei! You can't make jokes the whole evening."

"And you can't preach the whole evening, Mamma," said Lena. "When you get anything into your head there's no peace for anybody. Garik, play something, won't you? Play some Beethoven, you know you love him."

Garik obediently sat down to the grand piano. He played stormily, his whole body vibrating and his mouth opening and shutting as if he were soundlessly barking. This went on for some time, everyone listening in patient silence, with thoughtful expressions on their faces. Suddenly Max touched Vadim on the sleeve and beckoned to him. They slipped unnoticed into the passage.

"What d'you think, Vadim? Would it be all right for me to go?"

"Go?" echoed Vadim in astonishment. "Without saying good-bye?"

"Oh, I'll say good-bye to Lena. It's all so boring, isn't it?"

Vadim smiled and nodded.

"And altogether it's so...so..." Max broke off in confusion and sighed. "It's all wrong somehow. It's too bad—you see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes," said Vadim, beginning to look with interest at Max.

"You know," said Max, "I didn't like the looks of this Noah's ark from the very beginning. Garik from the Conservatory, Marik from the observatory, and all that.... It's all right for Garik, but what's there for me to do here? Why couldn't she tell me straight out?"

"Tell you what?"

"Well, I mean...why couldn't she say: 'you're not wanted,' and have done with it!" Pausing for a moment, he said in a low, astonished voice: "And all because of Palavin! A chap with absolutely nothing in him. Can't she see that? No! And she never will!"

Max shook his head resolutely. "At least it's taught me one thing—she's the same sort herself." Max glanced uncertainly at Vadim. Vadim frowned and looked away. "But even now, when I see what she is, it hurts, Vadim. If you'd ever loved anyone, Vadim, you'd understand. It's bad enough when you are not loved, but it's still worse when you suddenly see you've been deceiving yourself. When everything you've built up in your own heart, and been secretly admiring, and adding something new and beautiful to every day, suddenly collapses, smashes to smithereens..." Max laughed mirthlessly. "But what's the good of talking? You probably think it's funny. I've been drinking. Everything'll be all right. You never loved her. Never. I know you didn't. You're a clever chap. But I—well, I'm off. I'm homesick."

Max turned his shortsighted eyes helplessly, guiltily on Vadim, pressed his hand violently, and went rapidly up to the coat-rack.

"Just a minute," said Vadim. "You wanted to say good-bye to Lena, didn't you?"

"Did I? Well, call her."

Max went out.

The musical evening was still in full swing in the big room. Then there was a little dancing, and the guests began to take their departure. Two girls disappeared, the airman said good night and went into the next room to sleep. He was a guest from Leningrad at the Medovskys'.

Just as Vadim was making up his mind to go—it was about twelve o'clock—a short, broad-shouldered man with silver hair and hazel eyes like Lena's, came into the room.

"Daddy!" exclaimed Lena joyfully. "How early you are tonight!"

"This is early for Konstantin Ivanovich," explained Albina Trofimovna. "Eat something, Konstantin, have something to drink! Our young guests will treat you."

Medovsky shook hands all round and drank a glass of vodka, standing up. Vadim liked his frank, tanned face and serene smile.

"Amuse yourselves, comrades! Why have you stopped talking?" he said, munching a pickle with zest, and smiling. The muscles twitched in his cheeks. "Behave as if I wasn't here. I'm still at work, really."

"You're not a bit in their way, and they're not in yours, Konstantin," said Albina Trofimovna. "Do go on eating!"

Medovsky sat in the room for another ten minutes, listened to Garik's playing, exchanged some facetious remarks with Lena and her girl friends, and, on learning that the young folk had run out of cigarettes, placed a box of "Kazbek" on the table. After this he said good night and left the room.

Vadim ran after him and caught him in the passage.

"Konstantin Ivanovich! Can you give me two minutes?"

"Certainly!"

Medovsky asked Vadim into his study. When Vadim found himself in the big room (which seemed smaller than it was on account of the many bookshelves and the huge desk encumbered with books, papers, and various metal objects) and sat down in the capacious armchair at the desk, it seemed to him that he had strayed into quite a different flat, into another house. Even the air was different here, fresh, and almost chilly.

"At your service," said Medovsky. He too sat down, but got up immediately and went to the door and shut it firmly. The piano in the other room sounded quieter. "That's better. I'm at your service."

Vadim began speaking about Solokhin, and Medovsky listened in silence, glancing at Vadim with ever-growing interest and astonishment.

"I must say what you have told me is a surprise!" he declared when Vadim finished talking. "It really is! Somehow I associated you with Lena. I think it was you who was late for the theatre with her one evening, wasn't it? I remember, I remember! And you see I'm accustomed to talking to Lena and her friends about everything under the sun except what is serious. Least of all about factory business. And about my own factory! It's incredible!" He laughed, and then frowned, rubbing his fingers over his eyes. "What you have told me is very interesting," he said gravely. "And important. I'll write down the name. Solokhin? So-lo-khin. I'll look into it tomorrow. That I promise you. I'm still new at the works, you see, and I had no idea that our Komsomol members were in such close contact with the students. That's splendid! Has it been going on long?"

"Not very. Only a month."

"Tell me all about it, in greater detail. How did it begin? What has been done up to now? Have a cigarette."

Vadim spoke for a long time. They both became so engrossed in their talk they did not notice when the music stopped in the next room and the voices died down. Albina Trofimovna peeped in.

"Now what are they up to in there? I thought you were playing chess. For heavens' sake, how stuffy it is! You could cut the air with a knife!"

Medovsky waved her away with his hand.

"We're working, Mother! Bring us a cup of tea!"

"Excuse me, Konstantin Ivanovich, it's late. I must go," said Vadim. "And I'm sure you ought to rest..."

"Rest? I have rested!" Medovsky gave a short laugh, taking Vadim by the elbow and glancing at the clock. "It's late, though. Come along! I'll look into the Solokhin business. It's very important. Only yesterday the Party organizer complained to me of the Invention Bureau's work. I'll look into it, I promise you."

They went into the dining room. The lid of the piano was lowered, everything cleared away from the table, and the only light came from an attractive wall bracket with a frosted shade in the form of a lily. Lena and Palavin were sitting together on the sofa talking in undertones. On Palavin's knees lay an open box of chocolates.

"Well? The ball appears to be over," said Medovsky. "But there are still some chocolates left, I observe."

"You can't imagine what a sweet-tooth Sergei is, Daddy!" laughed Lena. "He smokes, and he likes sweets. Isn't that funny?"

"Does he?" said Medovsky. "Wonderful chap! But Vadim here has been telling me the most interesting things. It appears your Institute, Lena, is a patron of my plant. And the Komsomol members have been doing such fine work. Yet you never told me a word about it!"

"It just never came up, Daddy."

"I think you might have found an opportunity."

"It's not so interesting as all that, you know," said Lena saucily. "It's much ado about nothing. As a matter of fact, the only person who gets anything out of it is our Komsomol Secretary, Galustyan. It gets him a pat on the back from the District Committee, and a word of mention in some paper. The students are up to their neck in work as it is."

"Indeed!" said Medovsky in surprise. "Vadim told me a very different story."

"But Lena's never once been to the plant," said Vadim. "She's just repeating what she's heard."

Medovsky nodded.

"That's what I think. It seems a pity that my daughter should take no interest in such important Komsomol affairs. It does really."

Lena shrugged her shoulders and popped a chocolate into her mouth.

"What's the good of all this talk, Konstantin?" said Albina Trofimovna, who had just come into the room. "Lena has her whole life before her. All her life she'll work, do nothing but work. Let her have a good time without all these cares and social duties during her three or four student years! It's not so much! Student years—they're the brightest, happiest time of our lives, aren't they? But you can't wait! You want to get her into harness already, to weigh her down. There's plenty of time, goodness knows. . . ."

"Mamma's quite right," said Lena in aggrieved tones, scowling at her father. "Wait till I graduate, and they send me to Kamchatka, or somewhere. Then you'll be sorry!"

"I shall be only too glad," said Medovsky, frowning. "Well, good night, young folks! Good-bye, Vadim!"

He shook hands with Vadim and Sergei and left the room.

Vadim, too, took his leave. Sergei extended a languid hand without rising from the sofa. He was apparently in no hurry to go. But this could no longer affect Vadim.

Lena followed him into the passage.

"It's all your fault," she whispered, with a short laugh.

Vadim put on his things in silence, and picked up his brief case. Lena moved nearer to him. By the strange, almost imperceptible smile on her face, Vadim guessed that she had something special to say to him.

"Are you angry with me?" she asked softly, looking up at him with her head bent slightly to one side.

"Me? Not a bit!"

Lena shook her head accusingly.

"I can see you are. Don't tell stories. You always were honest, Vadim, be honest now, too."

"I assure you I'm not a bit angry," said Vadim quietly.

"What's the matter then?"

"There's nothing the matter."

They were standing in the empty passage, next to a small cupboard containing a disconnected telephone. On the top of the cupboard lay a round, gleaming lamp shade, probably in readiness for a light in the passage. Lena drummed on it with her fingers, and the shade responded with a faint tinkle.

Suddenly Lena smiled.

"There never was anything, really! Was there, now?"

It was not going to be so easy to forget her face. He averted his eyes and suddenly caught sight of her reflection in the convex lamp shade. What he saw was a squeezed up narrow forehead, the lower part of the face hideously swollen. Huge teeth showed in a grin. . . .

"Oh yes there was," said Vadim, looking straight into her eyes. "But all that doesn't matter any more."

"I know it doesn't," nodded Lena. "I suppose you're surprised Sergei doesn't go home. They've got repairs in their place, and he's staying the night."

"It's no business of mine. I'm very tired, Lenchka. Good night."

He held out his hand to her.

"Wait a minute! Only tell me—have you got anyone else? Do tell me, Vadim!"

"That doesn't matter, either."

"What made you come to see me?"

"I wanted to compare you, and convince myself finally."

"Oh, so that's it! At last!" Lena gave an excited laugh. "I had no need to do any comparing, I realized how things were long ago, if you want to know. . . ."

"I'm going."

"No!" She clutched at his sleeve, saying in a fierce whisper: "If you want to know, I only made friends with you to get to know Sergei. Yes, I did! You're blind, you. . . You'll never be able to make girls like you, because you're such a. . . You know nothing about people."

"I've heard that too, Lena. From Sergei. May I go?"

"Good-bye!" She clicked the lock and opened the door wide. "Now you know everything."

"I knew it long ago, Lenchka. The farewell scene wasn't really necessary," said Vadim, laughing.

He stepped out on to the staircase, which still smelled of damp plaster.

Chapter 24

The next morning Vadim called up Valya Gruzinova. She told him that she wanted to see him, and the sooner the better. Today if possible. They arranged to meet at 6 p.m. in the entrance hall of the clinic.

On his way, Vadim asked himself why Valya should be in such a hurry to see him? Palavin was to read his novel at the Institute tonight. Perhaps he had not invited her, and she wanted to go. Or she might have heard of her rival, Lena Medovskaya, and wanted to know the

details from Vadim. Perhaps she would ask for his intervention. But he would certainly not get involved in anything of the sort.

And yet none of these suppositions was likely to be correct. Such behaviour would not be like Valya. It must be something more complicated, more important, and perhaps had nothing to do with Sergei.

Valya met him in a friendly manner, but he could discern anxiety in her glance.

"I hope I haven't dragged you away from anything special."

"There's always plenty to do. But you wanted to see me about something special, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes. This is by no means a lovers' tryst." Valya smiled mirthlessly. "I only ask you for twenty-five minutes. What does the meeting say to my request?"

"Agreed unanimously," said Vadim.

"All right. Come on, then."

They went up to the second floor, Valya leading Vadim into an empty room containing two office desks, a wooden bench, and one of those glazed cupboards used for stacking files or hospital cards. She turned on a table lamp and sat down at one of the desks. Vadim seated himself on the bench.

For a moment Valya said nothing, only drawing some rapid and unnecessary lines on a piece of paper. She was obviously wrought up.

"I'll light up if I may," he said.

"Do!" Valya sat with her head bent as he lit a cigarette, and then said: "How's your mother, Vadim?"

"Everything seems to be going on all right. She'll be home in a day or two."

"I'm so glad, Vadim."

There was a pause. Valya once again started drawing something that looked like a big "P." Suddenly raising her head, she asked:

"Vadim, what were you intending to do tonight?"

"There's something on at the Institute. Sergei's going to read his novel."

"Oh, yes, his novel! Is it interesting?"

"It ought to be. It's a story of the plant, and the Komsomol boys and girls from the works will be there."

"Looks as if Sergei hadn't invited her," thought Vadim. Aloud he said in simple, friendly tones:

"Why don't you come, Valya? It's sure to be interesting. You must come!"

"Oh, no, I have no time!" said Valya hurriedly. "I'm going to Kharkov the day after tomorrow, and I have things to buy, packing to do."

"To Kharkov! What for?"

"To work. I shall have very interesting practice there, along the lines of my dissertation."

"For long?"

"For a year or, perhaps, a year and a half."

She fell silent again. Her pencil ran over the paper forming letters automatically, and Vadim could now read the letters "alav" next to the enormous black "P." And all of a sudden, somewhat to his own surprise, he asked:

"What's wrong between you and Palavin? Has anything happened?"

"Yes. But... Vadim!" Valya looked at him with stern determination. "Don't think I'm telling you all this from any petty motive, from a desire for revenge or the hope of setting things right. No, Vadim! What has happened can never be set right. It's my own sorrow, or rather my own mistake or misfortune. But you see it concerns his social... his social behaviour. Or, perhaps, I should say it concerns other people. You, for instance, and some others. You will see... Vadim, you've been his friend since childhood, haven't you?"

"Since childhood."

"I've known him for ages too. Nearly three years. I thought three years was long enough to know a person. . . ."

"It depends on what sort of years," Vadim said with a smile, "and what sort of person."

"That's true. Well, it appears it isn't enough. I thought he was clever and honest and talented. But I'd better tell you all about it from the beginning. How it all happened. Well, then: I met him in the train when he was coming back from the army. He was so jolly and lively then, so simple and frank. He intended to enter an institute straightaway. I was a student and he asked me all about student life, and exams, and how to get in, and about our parties and all that. I promised to find out something for him, get him books. . . . In a word, we made friends."

By now Valya had written out the whole word: "Palavin." Her pencil stopped for a moment and then started again, forming hasty loops around the name.

"We began meeting in Moscow, oftener and oftener. I liked him awfully. We meant to get married, at least I thought so. He often spoke about it, you see we were very intimate. . . . That was the first summer of our friendship. Then you arrived from the Far East—we met, remember? And we had one more summer, a very happy one. Irina Victorovna went away, Sasha was in a Young Pioneer camp. I don't think you were in Moscow that summer. Oh, yes, you went to Armenia or somewhere. He was all alone, I helped him, I cooked, I did a little washing, and . . . and we were very gay and happy. He was writing a play about student life. He consulted me about it all the time. And my people were sure we would marry. You see everyone knew about us. Of course, my mother didn't know everything. And then somehow things began to go wrong. I started working. We saw less and less of one another. And we never met in a nice open way. Only

at home. He never went about with me, to the theatre, or the cinema or anywhere. He was always finding reasons not to, always lying, inventing things. Once when I bought tickets for a new performance at the Bolshoi Theatre—I forget what it was—he said: ‘All right, let’s go! But you’re not to wear your glasses in the theatre.’” Valya laughed nervously and blushed. “Of course all that’s nonsense, not worth mentioning, perhaps. Well, anyhow, I began to feel that he was rather ashamed of me, he never introduced me to any of his friends, and nothing would induce him to take me to a party at his Institute. I began to understand that he was lying to me, and had been lying all along. And I decided to leave him, to his intense relief. It was hard, Vadim!”

Valya seemed to have calmed down. Her voice no longer trembled; it had become weary and flat. The pencil which she still held between her fingers slowly revolved around the word “Palavin,” which gradually disappeared beneath the thick black lines.

“And then . . . it was two or three months ago. . . . He came to me again as if nothing had happened, ever so spry and jolly. He’d begun smoking a pipe, and once my father got him some good tobacco, Bulgarian or something. Well, it turned out he’d used it all, and he couldn’t live without tobacco, could he? And then it turned out he had another request, a more important one. A cousin of mine is a postgraduate of the Moscow University, a philologist, the same as Sergei, and he was doing a dissertation on Turgenev. Sergei asked me to introduce him to Victor, he wanted to get some information from him for his own paper. Well, so he began coming to me again. I don’t know what for. He may not have meant anything by it, or perhaps it was his vanity. Perhaps he wanted to find out if I still cared for him as before. He must have known how hard it had been for me to break things off, and leave him, and how I had tried to forget it all . .

And, of course, he knew it would be painful for me to have it start all over again so casually and pointlessly. And then—you and I are grown-up people, Vadim—I thought I was going to have a baby. I was mistaken, but at that time I did think so. I wrote him a letter. And then everything happened like in cheap novels. My sister, Zhenya, chanced to read the letter, and told my mother all about it. . . . And he happened to look in about something when I wasn't at home. And my mother and Zhenya. . . I didn't want them to, Vadim—you do understand that, don't you? They did it themselves, I wasn't even at home. My mother asked him if he thought of marrying me. And he—it's too ridiculous, Vadim!—he said: 'I must consult with my mother.' There was a beastly scene. At first he tried to explain, lied, of course, put up a defence. My mother, too, no doubt, talked a lot of nonsense, and lost her head, and Zhenya shouted at him. And then he said it was all a frame-up, that they were trying to force him to marry me, and he wasn't having any. And he began shouting too: where are your proofs? Just try and fasten it on me, and so on. Zhenya struck him. . . ."

Valya suddenly covered her face with her hand, as children do when they are going to cry. The other hand, holding the pencil tight, trembled, so that the point went through the paper and broke. She sobbed soundlessly, raising her shoulders and dropping her head lower and lower.

"Valya, don't! Hush!" said Vadim, awkwardly stroking her hair. "Pull yourself together!"

"I'm ashamed to go back to all that," she sobbed. "It's so disgusting, so idiotic! He said: 'I have done with this house.' And he went away in a huff. . . and probably as pleased as punch. You see, now he was the offended party. He went away to write his play, and his skits, and speak at meetings, and make witty remarks, and argue. . . ."

She stopped for a moment, suppressing her sobs, and then raised her head defiantly.

"Don't think I'm crying because I'm crossed in love. D'you hear me?" she said in firm tones. "There's nothing but contempt left in me. I'm no Katya Maslova or Roberta Alden.* I'm not like that, and the times are different, and our life is quite different."

"Of course," said Vadim.

Valya dried her eyes with her handkerchief.

"And now for the chief thing," she continued, trying to smile. "Why did I ask you to come and see me? You are probably wondering."

"No, no! Go on!"

"Very well! There's only one thing I don't understand, Vadim. That man—he's got an honorary scholarship, he's all over the place, he's an active social worker, he means to join the Party. They're sending him to Leningrad. . . ."

"To Leningrad?"

"He says they're sending him to a students' scientific conference in Leningrad. He's written a novel, which whether it's talented or not is sure to be 'just the right thing.' Everything as it should be. And to be such a rotter in private life! In private life he's simply a petty, worthless egoist, isn't he? He's happy now that everything has turned out 'so well' with me. And he's doubly happy that I'm going to Kharkov. I don't care. It's not because of him I'm going. And I'm not trying to pay off old scores. You mustn't misunderstand me, Vadim! I don't even hate him any more. I'm just indifferent. He's gone out of my life and he'll never come back. But, Vadim, I'm a Komsomol member and so are you. And I ask you: does he really deserve all those distinctions, and a scholarship besides?"

* Katya Maslova—heroine of Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*.

Roberta Alden—heroine of Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy*—Tr.

Perhaps everything's all right, and I just don't understand...."

Vadim scowled at her.

"He won't necessarily be accepted in the Party just because he wants to join it," he said. "And he won't go to Leningrad."

"And what about his other successes?"

"What successes?"

"His research paper, his scholarship...."

"What successes?" repeated Vadim, as if he had not heard her. "There aren't any dual personalities. In the end only one always remains, the real one that's the hardest to detect. It is, it is."

"What is?" asked Valya. "I don't understand you."

"I'm thinking, Valya. I'm thinking about him. He's a wily individual, apparently. I've suspected that for some time. You see, all this that you've told me isn't—how shall I put it?—a criminal offence. You can't prove it, you know. But we don't need to prove anything. It's perfectly clear. Now I can see right through him."

Valya rose, putting on her coat in silence.

"Our talk has been quite impersonal, hasn't it, Vadim?"

"Strictly impersonal."

"Very well. And please don't think I'm going away because of all this. I've been wanting for ages to work at the Kharkov Institute. I have a very interesting theme for my dissertation...."

Valya began talking of her work and went on doing so as they crossed the yard and walked along the street. Vadim listened to her in silence, walking by her side, her arm in his. He was thinking of Palavin.... And of himself.... They said good-bye in the street.

Extending her hand in farewell, Valya asked:

"Did I do right to tell you?" she laughed uncertainly. "Has it made you lose your respect for me?"

"I respect you still more, now."

"Really?"

"Really and truly!"

Valya moved closer to him, burying her face in his shoulder like a little girl. He put his arms round her.

"I had a brother. He was so tall and strong," whispered Valya. "He was killed in the Finnish War. . . ."

After a pause she asked:

~ "Dima . . . may I write to you sometimes?"

"Of course, Valya. I'll write to you myself."

Vadim arrived at the club ten minutes before the reading began. Almost all the seats in the small auditorium were taken already; this was an unusual event in the life of the Institute, and every one wished to be present. Students had been invited from other departments and some of the Komsomol members from the plant came. These sat waiting patiently, exchanging remarks in undertones and glancing respectfully at the platform. Students from the Literature Department walked about the hall and corridors, thoroughly at home. Some of them went up to Palavin, who was sitting on the platform next to Spartak, and stood there laughing and talking, and taking surreptitious peeps at the manuscript in his hands.

Andrei had seen to it that most of the members of the literary circle were there. Among them was Igor Sotnikov in a new blue suit and red tie, his hair carefully slicked down and exuding overpowering whiffs of eau de Cologne.

Vadim stood chatting with friends a minute or two, when he caught sight of Olga, standing at the end of the hall and looking at a huge, brilliantly coloured announcement of the reading. She had on the blue dress she had worn at the New Year's party.

She glanced up happily when Vadim approached

"I'm so glad to see you!" she said. "Andrei abandoned me, and I don't know a soul here. He never thinks of introducing me to people."

Vadim was glad, too. He had often thought of Olga, especially during the last few days. He remembered her not as he had seen her at the New Year's party, but as she was when she went skiing with him, in her grey sweater and fur cap, her eyelashes coated with rime. He remembered every minute of that strange, snowy day, and the further it receded in time, the more vivid and extraordinary became his recollections. But for some reason he could not recall her face. It would flash across his memory for only an instant, blurred, like a face seen in a dream.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked in surprise. "Have you forgotten me? Don't you recognize me?"

"I haven't seen you for such a long time."

"Simply ages! You might at least have sent regards with Andrei."

"So might you."

"Oh, but I did! Again and again, but you never replied."

"Andrei never told me."

"Didn't he? I'll confront him with it!"

She took Vadim's arm and led him over to Andrei, who was talking to Balashov.

"Andrei!" said Olga, touching her brother on the shoulder. "Did you ever give Vadim the regards I sent him?"

Andrei shook her hand off his shoulder and continued talking without so much as turning around.

"Do you hear me, Andrei?"

"What d'you want?"

"I'm asking you if you ever gave Vadim the regards I sent him?"

"What regards? I don't remember. Didn't I give them to you, Vadim?"

Vadim shook his head.

"Apparently I didn't. He says I didn't."

Olga flushed with vexation as she looked at her brother.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Awfully sorry, Olga, but do leave me alone. Ali right, I forgot. Don't interrupt me."

"You—" said Olga vehemently, and walked to the other end of the hall, where Vadim took a seat beside her.

"So you see it wasn't my fault," he said.

"But you might have sent a message to me anyway," said Olga after a moment. "Oh, of course, I'm the one to blame, and most of all for not having brought up my brother better. I had no time to teach him manners, and here's the result."

In the meantime Marina Gravets had appeared on the platform, flushed and excited as usual, and looking as important as if she were the star of the evening herself.

"We will now begin our literary evening," she announced. "Tonight Sergei Palavin, a third-year student, will read his story, *High Tension*. After the interval two students will read their critical reports on the book, and then anyone who wants to, can speak."

Palavin, a bulky folder under his arm, rose and went to the speaker's desk. He seemed to be nervous, shifting the carafe from one edge of the desk to the other and turning his hand through his hair. At last he clutched the desk with both hands as though he meant to pick it up, and began to read in a loud voice:

"The silence of the morning was rent by a prolonged whistle. Outside it was cold and dark. Maxim Tolokin, turner, was, as usual, the first in the hostel to get up. He was a stocky, muscular lad with calm grey eyes. . . ."

As Palavin calmed down, he began to enjoy the sound of his own voice, and to read with feeling. By changes of expression and modulations of his voice, he tried to indicate the various personages in his story. When he came to a passage he particularly liked he would raise his head and glance at his audience with an irrepressible smile.

Latecomers kept arriving. The angry whisperings of the students on duty at the doors sent them tiptoeing to the first empty seats. Lena Medovskaya entered with a plump well-dressed woman carrying a muff, and two of the girls who had been at the housewarming. Vadim recognized the woman as Albina Trofimovna. The two girls hung back shyly, but Lena and her mother made their way to the front row, with a creaking of shoes and a rustling of skirts. There were a few professors in this row, some keen students armed with notebooks and fountain pens, and the two critics.

The work was a long short-story rather than a novel, since it consisted of only fifty pages. The plot was as follows: the turner Tolokin is in love with a girl named Polyva who works as secretary in the plant administration offices; Polyva decides to abandon office work in order to enter one of the shops, but Tolokin is against this; he does not believe she will ever make good there, besides, he prefers having his girl work at a "clean job." They quarrel; Polyva turns out to be an excellent worker and soon defeats Tolokin in socialist emulation; this complicates their relationship, but everything turns out all right in the end. Palavin introduced minor characters such as the Komsomol organizer, the foreman of the shop, and one Uncle Yasha, a supply man, who was the evil spirit sowing contention between the two lovers.

The more Vadim listened, the more annoyed he became. The feeling was roused less by the dullness of the story than by the fact that Vadim could not put his finger on the cause of this dullness. He remembered what Valya

had said: everything seemed right, but somehow it all added up to something wrong. It ought to have been a clever novel, but really it was utterly mediocre. It appeared to be a novel bearing on burning problems of the day, but actually it was useless and even in some way harmful.

Everything, from the first page to the last, was commonplace and tediously familiar, and that because it was reminiscent not of real life, but of some other novels, stories and newspaper contributions. Vadim was quite surprised. He had not expected Palavin to write anything so hopelessly dull. "Perhaps I'm the only one who feels that way. Perhaps there's something I missed," he thought, glancing at Olga.

She was sitting erect, gazing intently at Palavin. She seemed to be living through all the vicissitudes of the story and even smiled from time to time.

"Do you like it?" whispered Vadim.

"Like it? No." she admitted with a guilty laugh. "It's awfully boring. But I like to watch him. He's a real actor. Do you know what he reminds me of? A blackcock in the spring, warbling away, and hearing nothing but its own song."

Vadim cast a rapid glance over the audience. No, he was not the only one who was bored. In fact, he could not find a single person who seemed in the least interested. The more decorous ones were sitting with that stony expression on their faces with which people listen to dull lectures. Some were drowsing, others, hardly able to restrain their impatience, gave listless coughs and whispered to their neighbours. A few people walked out during the reading. Everybody turned to look at them, whispering "Sh-h-h!" with sudden animation.

Finally Palavin came to the closing line:

"Through the wide fanlight came a blinding ray of spring sunshine."

He closed his manuscript, took a drink of water, and said in a voice trembling with fatigue and emotion:

"That's all. Finis. . . ."

Then he smiled, placed the carafe on the other side of the desk, and went back to his seat. Someone in the front row began to clap and the audience politely took it up. But the applause lacked enthusiasm, though it obviously expressed relief. Then Marina Gravets rose and announced an interval.

The two critics were Nina Fokina and a curly-headed youth who, like Nina, wore glasses. Their reports were brief and not very interesting. They both seemed at a loss for words, repeating themselves incessantly and arguing with one another feebly on minor points. Despite her conscientious efforts, Nina Fokina could not explain why "the idea of the novel had not, on the whole, found adequate expression." She dwelt on trifles, quoting sentences and using so many expressions from the *Theory of Literature* textbook that Vadim found her report as boring as Palavin's novel.

While Nina was speaking, Palavin gazed absently out over the audience. The two reports were followed by a strained silence. No one wished to be the first to speak.

"Who wishes to take the floor? Speak up, comrades," said Marina encouragingly. Palavin uttered a short laugh.

"'Silent stood the people,'" he said.

"Are you going to speak?" whispered Olga to Vadim.

"No," said Vadim, shaking his head.

He knew he must not speak tonight. He would not be able to keep cool and would say things that should not be spoken here, at such a meeting. He could see that nobody was very anxious to speak. Many had gone home during the interval, and those who remained looked ill.

at ease, as if they regretted having stayed. The strained silence continued. Marina motioned to Andrei to begin, but he shrugged his shoulders and turned away, lowering his head so that Marina could not see him. Suddenly the ringing voice of Valya Mauer was heard.

"May I speak from my place, Marina?" she asked.

"No, come up to the platform."

"I only want to say a word."

"It doesn't matter."

Valya quickly ran up the steps of the platform and said, with a radiant smile:

"I just wanted to say that I don't think the story's well written, because it was very dull to listen to. Of course, I don't know life at a plant, but if the story had been well told, I would have enjoyed listening to it. But it was very boring."

Her smile still more radiant, Valya ran back to her seat. A stir passed through the hall, someone laughed, and someone else gave a clap or two. Palavin shot a supercilious smile at Valya Mauer. Now other speakers took the floor—Tezya Velikanova, Max, Lagodenko and Andrei. All of them criticized the work sharply, especially Lagodenko. As was his custom, he did not stand behind the speaker's desk, but beside it, his feet planted wide apart, his hands thrust into his wide sailor's belt. He spoke at great length, and with obvious enjoyment, interspersing his speech with puns and witticisms which somewhat revived the audience.

At first Palavin attempted to argue from where he was sitting, angrily interrupting the speakers with cries of "That's all wrong!" "Don't exaggerate!" "You don't know factory life!" "Oh, come!" But Marina put a stop to this, and for some time thereafter he showed his indignation by shrugging his shoulders and hurriedly jotting down notes. Soon, however, he calmed down and simply sat there with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his

eyes fastened on the young workers from the plant as if he hoped they would come to his defence.

Presently Balashov walked quickly to the platform. Pale from nervousness, he cleared his throat, scowled, and began to speak loudly and impulsively. What he said was more devastating than any of the other criticism.

"The trouble is not just that the author doesn't know life at the factory, and has only the vaguest conception of how a plant is run," said Balashov. "The trouble is that Palavin seems to have concocted his novel according to a ready-made prescription. He has no real knowledge of either the life or the people he sets out to write about, nothing but a barren outline of the story. And that barren outline is all there is to it, after he's put it down on paper. There are no live people in his story. Does his Tolokin resemble a Soviet worker, a Komsomol member? He says all the right words, like in the newspapers, but they don't mean anything, because he isn't alive; he seems to be made of cardboard. The author should have visited our plant more often, like the other students. Perhaps something would have come of his work then. As it is, the story's absolutely worthless, only fit to be scrapped."

When Balashov had finished, everyone applauded, Vadim along with the rest, and, perhaps, loudest of all. He was glad it was Balashov who had expressed such merited and scathing criticism.

After Balashov's speech, Palavin hastened to the speaker's desk. Again he seized it with both hands. But this time it seemed to Vadim that he did it in order to keep himself from falling.

"First of all, let me thank my comrades for their criticism," he began with forced animation. "Thank you very much. Of particular value to me were the remarks of my fellow students acting as opponents. They read the novel carefully and made a very serious, helpful anal-

ysis. Naturally, I'm very grateful to them. But, comrades," here he brought his palm down on the desk and was silent for a few seconds, frowning as though searching his mind for something. It was painful to watch him. Suddenly he threw back his head. "But, comrades, I can't accept mere offhand criticism not based on facts. When a person presumes to criticize things he doesn't know anything about and does so in a coarse, rude way, I feel just like getting up and leaving. What good does such criticism do? Why should I listen to abusive criticism like Lagodenko's which doesn't help me in the least, or open my eyes to anything I had overlooked? It is no news to me that this gentleman is an ignoramus. And yet he assumes the pose of a mentor and tries to teach me from this platform. For example—" and Palavin glanced at his notes, giving a disparaging laugh. "He says I know nothing about a factory. He says he'd like to see Palavin cut a bolt with a diestock. A bolt, according to him, is cut not with a diestock but with dies. And this little detail was supposed to have exposed the fallaciousness of the entire story. Well, just listen to this, monseigneur mechanic—a diestock is the name of the frame which holds the dies. Do you understand? You want to learn a thing or two yourself before you start teaching others."

"Stick to the point," called Lagodenko good-naturedly. "We're talking about the story, if I'm not mistaken, and not tools."

Palavin swung around to Marina Gravets.

"I beg you to spare me his precepts at least while I'm addressing the audience," he said.

"Lagodenko, order please, don't interrupt," said Marina sternly.

"And then Andrei Sirikh said that the love scenes were artificial and primitive, that people don't talk and think like that in such circumstances. Well, there's no denying that Sirikh is a great expert on love," said Palavin with

a short laugh, "but a bare statement's hardly enough. It has to be based on fact. Now maybe he'd be good enough to explain to us just how people *do* talk and think in such circumstances? Unfortunately he did not volunteer this information, which, coming from such a great specialist might have been highly instructive. He might have cited Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring*, or *Anna Karenina*, page so-and-so. This then, comrades, is why I am not satisfied with the criticism of my book. Much that was said was serious and to the point, but much more was absurd and ill-considered. Once more let me thank you all, especially the comrades from the plant; I shall—well—er, take your criticism into consideration, so to speak. And you may be sure I shall revise the book and finish it."

With a gesture that was as much a threat as a confirmation, he left the speaker's desk and took his seat. But it was obvious to Vadim that this was not the old Palavin—not the brilliant, self-assured Palavin, haloed with unwavering success. He still held himself erect and spoke emphatically, he still joked and punned aggressively, but he was not the same person. He seemed to have become actually shorter and—worst of all for a boy like Sergei—for the first time in his life he looked ridiculous. For some reason everyone felt uncomfortable and avoided speaking to him.

Vadim stopped him on the stairs.

"Listen, do you consider *yourself* an expert on love and the tender emotions?" he asked.

For a second Palavin looked at Vadim dazedly, and then he wiped his pale face and said sharply:

"It's a put-up job! You arranged it all in advance. And Sirikh invited those workers here on purpose."

"Didn't I hear you with my own ears thank them for their criticism?"

"It's a put-up job!" repeated Palavin. "I'm not blind. Very well, we'll see! . . ."

And he went away pressing his bulging folder tight to his side.

At that moment Lena rushed up to Vadim.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she said. "You planned all this, and invited those fitters here. Why? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"You ought to be ashamed of repeating nonsense like that," said Spartak, who had just joined them. "Think what you're saying!"

"I'm not blind, either! It's not fair, and not comradely!" cried Lena in a voice trembling with rage. Vadim had never before seen her so upset. She was almost weeping. "You've ruined him! After all, he's not Leo Tolstoy or Ilya Ehrenburg."

Albina Trofimovna nodded her approval.

"Vultures—that's what you are—vultures!" she said. "You mustn't hurt each other like that, boys. The author has his weaknesses, of course. He's only a beginner, isn't he? That must be taken into account."

"Oh, come along, Mamma. It was all planned in advance."

Olga slipped over to Vadim when he wasn't looking and took him by the arm.

"I feel awfully sorry for. . ." she began.

"Who for?" interrupted Vadim, turning quickly. "For him? Why should you? It serves him right for undertaking to write about things he knows nothing about. You shouldn't feel sorry for him."

"It's Lena I feel sorry for, not that blackcock. What agonies she went through while they were speaking! She even made notes as if she intended to speak herself, then tore them up."

"She did? I never noticed."

"She must be terribly in love with him, poor kid."

It was not very late, and the hall was being cleared for dancing. The sounds of the piano were followed by the noise of chairs being moved out of the way. Vadim had no intention of dancing, but he went back to the hall.

Alexei was playing the piano. The students and their guests were dancing with one another. One of the girls began singing, and Lagodenko joined in. It became one of the usual gay, noisy Saturday evening parties.

The huge gaudy announcement of the reading of Palavin's book hung precariously from a single nail. One of the couples accidentally ripped it off when dancing past, and another couple kicked it under the piano.

Chapter 25

In March the Institute at last won its case against "Chemical Supplies." This meant that it came into possession of the entire ground floor, and a small gym was equipped there to supplement the Institute's large gym. The new hall was given over to volleyball, so it came to be called the volleyball gym. Vasili Adamovich Kulbitsky, the coach, strutted about as if he had been made Dean, or at the very least promoted to a Chair.

The team began stiff training for the second round of the interinstitute elimination games. In the first round, held in November, the boys' team of the Pedagogical Institute had taken second place. First place had been taken by the students of the Chemical Institute.

Sergei Palavin was considered the Institute's best player, and he was the idol of the fans. He played in fourth position, leader of the attack. Vadim too was a good player. He played in third, passing to Palavin. The remaining four players of the picked team were from different departments.

After the fiasco of his literary debut, Palavin did not show up at the Institute for a week. His mother told all

who phoned that he had the flu. He returned on Tuesday, the day when the volleyball team practised, but he did not play, saying he was not well enough. His place was taken by Rashid, who, though he had only recently learned the game, made rapid progress thanks to his size and his natural strength and agility.

Volleyball is one of the most strenuous of games. Vadim was keenly aware of this when he began playing again, after a long interval. When practice was over, he slumped down on a bench, limp as a rag. Suddenly he caught sight of Spartak's curly head in the doorway.

"Is Belov here? I want to speak to you a minute."

Vadim changed his clothes, put his sports outfit into his bag and went out into the corridor. Spartak was leaning against the wall jotting something down in a notebook while he waited for him.

"Here's what I wanted to see you about, Dima," he said when Vadim appeared. "In a couple of days I have to make a report to the District Committee. Here's what I plan to say about our work at the plant. Look it over," and he handed Vadim the notebook. "And then there's this—we're holding a meeting of the S.R.S. today to choose a delegate to the Leningrad student scientific conference."

"Who are you thinking of sending?"

"I don't know. We'll decide that later. By the way—Sergei handed me this today." Spartak took a rolled magazine, still smelling of printer's ink, out of his pocket. "See page 20."

Vadim took the magazine—it was *Smena*—opened it at page 20, and saw an article by Palavin entitled "Turgenev the Playwright." It had been cut down to less than two pages. An introductory note stated that the article was an abridgment of a paper read before the Student Research Society by a third-year student of the Pedagogical Institute.

"In other words, Palavin is your delegate," asked Vadim, closing the magazine. He rolled it up and kept twisting it tighter and tighter.

"I'm not sure; we'll have to think it over. Give me the magazine, you'll tear it. Why shouldn't he be? He's finishing a paper on Chernyshevsky now—says it'll be ready in a few days. Why are you scowling? Have you two quarrelled? Surely not on account of that girl..."

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"I didn't really think it was."

"I wanted to speak to you about him," said Vadim.

"I know. About that evening?"

"What evening?"

"When he read his book. People have been asking me why we ever held a public reading of such trash, even inviting guests. They say we should have discussed it at the Bureau first."

"Why didn't you?"

"I'll tell you why," said Spartak, giving Vadim a grave look and throwing his arm across his shoulder. "We read the book—that is, I read it, and saw how weak it was and that people would have a lot to say against it. So far as the idea goes, there's nothing wrong with it; the theme is correctly presented and most topical—taken out of the papers. That's true, isn't it? And that fellow from the plant was wrong, of course, when he said the book was harmful. What's harmful about it? It's just that Palavin hadn't been able to handle the subject properly, and that's why it sounds so false. It's very feebly written."

"That's true—"

"And we didn't invite anybody, the people from the literary circle at the plant can hardly be called guests. There had to be a public reading so that our respected Sergei could get what was coming to him. It's just what

he needed. He's been putting on airs of late. Seems to think the whole world revolves around him."

Vadim laughed sarcastically, but said nothing.

"Yes, he has!" continued Spartak, warming up to the subject. "I don't suppose you've noticed it as much as I have. And I'm not the only one. And d'you know how the dizziness that comes from success can be cured? The same as any other dizziness—by a cold shower. The cold shower of criticism is very useful in such cases. Now d'you see?"

"I do. But I had something else to talk to you about."

"We'll find time, Dima. But..." Spartak glanced at his watch. "I've got to ring up the District Committee. You look through my plan now, and we'll have a talk after the S.R.S."

Vadim called out after him:

"I shall oppose his candidature."

"On what grounds?" shouted Spartak over his shoulder.

"You'll see..."

Vadim went quickly back, and almost ran into Palavin, who came round the corner no less quickly. Finding themselves face to face they both, as if at a signal, averted their eyes. For a few seconds they shifted their feet irresolutely, taking absurd mincing steps in their endeavours to pass each other. At last they separated.

"I wonder if he heard!" thought Vadim. "He probably guessed, even if he didn't hear. He must have guessed, he's got a nose for that sort of thing."

After Kozelsky's departure Ivan Antonovich had been appointed provisional head of the S.R.S. He brought with him to the meeting the first issue of the journal, fresh from the press. There was a joyful clamour as everyone jumped up and crowded round the table. The volume was

passed from hand to hand. Ivan Antonovich produced a copy of *Smena* as well, with Palavin's article in it. Condescendingly accepting congratulations, Palavin said with a smile that was at once modest and rueful:

"They've shortened it outrageously, simply cut it to pieces. It's played ducks and drakes with the style."

Palavin presented Ivan Antonovich with a copy, on page 20 of which he had written a courtesy inscription. Ivan Antonovich bowed formally as he accepted the gift, which he pressed to his breast with comic solemnity.

When the excitement had died down, Fyodor Kaplin declared the meeting open. He announced that the society must send a delegate to a students' scientific conference to be held in Leningrad University. The candidate chosen would have to be confirmed by the director and the Party Bureau. The delegate must be able to show some scientific work approved by the department's Council of Studies.

Ivan Antonovich proposed Andrei Sirikh and Kaplin. Kaplin himself proposed Palavin, and was seconded by Kamkova. Looking round at the faces of those present, Vadim could see that Kaplin's proposal had surprised nobody. Everyone heard him out with the utmost gravity, as he repeated facts which they all knew:

"Holder of scholarship . . . active Komsomol member and social worker . . . brilliant paper on Turgenev, published in a monthly, a new work on Chernyshevsky. . ."

Palavin himself listened as gravely as the rest—he even seemed indifferent. But the lightning glance, neither malicious nor triumphant, which he shot at Vadim revealed to the latter that Palavin was on the alert. Vadim had remained silent so far. He was listening. Somebody proposed Nina Fokina. Andrei's candidature came up once more, somebody else named Palavin again. Ivan Antonovich said they would have to familiarize themselves with Palavin's new work.

"There'll be plenty of time, Ivan Antonovich," said Kaplin. "You'll be handing it in this week, won't you, Sergei?"

"Oh, yes! I've only got a few trifling details to see to."

"There's plenty of time! The conference is fixed for the beginning of April," Kaplin went on. "I withdraw my candidature, comrades—I'm in my last year and have my graduation exams to prepare for. I second the nomination of Palavin."

At that juncture Palavin asked for the floor.

"I have another proposal, comrades," he said, getting up and looking ostensibly at Vadim, but actually over his head. "We ought to send Belov. His theme is the most interesting of all. He's been working at it for a long time and will have finished his paper in a few days."

Ivan Antonovich nodded his assent.

"Quite true. Belov's work should prove exceedingly interesting."

"Belov ought to be sent," repeated Palavin, resuming his seat.

"What about it, Vadim? Will you be ready?" inquired Kaplin.

Vadim got up with a resolute air. "I haven't finished my work yet. There's no point in discussing my candidature—my paper won't be ready for another two weeks or so. I second the candidature of Andrei Sirikh. I consider he deserves to be sent more than any of us. Sergei Palavin is the least deserving of us all."

A deep silence fell, during which everyone looked in astonishment at Vadim.

"What d'you mean by that?" asked Spartak. "Explain!"

"I will. I consider that we ought to send the best among us. The best not only as regards studies, but in the social, moral, Komsomol sense. And Palavin is the least worthy of all in that respect."

"Is he?" interrupted Kaplin. "Do you consider him an antisocial person?"

"Like all careerists."

"Me a careerist!"

"Is that news to you?"

A commotion arose in the hall, everyone speaking at once. Kaplin was holding on to Palavin's arm and trying to make him sit down, while Palavin was trying to tear himself away, repeating frantically:

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute, I say. . . ."

"Sit down!" shouted Kaplin, banging on the table with his fist. "Order! Order!"

Spartak came up to Vadim.

"You've got to explain. Here and now!"

"I'll explain the day after tomorrow at the Bureau. I'll explain in detail."

"Let him speak here!" shouted Palavin. "I demand that he speak here!"

"I'm not going to speak here," said Vadim.

"It's sheer intrigue! I demand an immediate explanation! How dare he!"

"I'm not going to explain here," repeated Vadim in a loud voice. "It has to do with your reputation as a Komsomol member. Don't get excited—I'll say everything at the Bureau."

"It looks like blackmail!" snorted Kamkova.

"I have been insulted! Let me . . . Ivan Antonovich!"

"I'm afraid I don't know much about your Komsomol rules. But this appears to be a matter of some delicacy. . . ."

Spartak thought for a moment, glancing furtively from Vadim to Palavin. Then, throwing back his head, he said:

"Good. If it's a matter of his Komsomol reputation it can't be gone into here."

Voices came from the audience, some serious, some jocose, as is always the way in such cases.

"Quite right, Spartak!"

"But we want to know!"

"Demand satisfaction, Palavin! Throw down your mitten!"

"Who's to be sent, then?"

"Quiet!" said Kaplin, raising his hand. "I agree with the Secretary of the Bureau. Apparently Belov has reasons for not wishing to speak out here. We have named the candidates provisionally: Sirikh, Palavin, Fokina. Which of them is to go will be determined in the next few days. That's all. I declare the meeting closed. Now for an announcement: Comrades, anyone desirous of having a copy of our journal can get it from Nina Fokina for two rubles fifty."

Students kept approaching Vadim, asking him in low voices: "What's the matter? Eh?"

"What's eating you?" asked Nina. "Between you and me he very likely is a careerist. But you ought to have very weighty grounds..."

Vadim waved them all off irritably.

"Have a little patience—you'll hear all about it..."

Gradually everybody left the hall. Palavin was the first to go, though he returned almost immediately and began talking to Kaplin about something. Vadim only heard a single sentence:

"I told you—remember?"

Putting his papers into his brief case, Kaplin nodded absently: "We'll look into it."

The two of them went out of the hall with Ivan Antonovich and Kamkova. Vadim stayed behind, knowing that he would have to have a talk with Spartak. At last everyone else had left the hall. Loud discussions could still be heard in the corridor. Someone—possibly the

thick-lipped senior who had sat next to Kaplin—was saying in a deep, fruity bass:

"In obscure cases like this the French always say: '*Cherchez la femme!*' Look for the woman in the case. Eh?"

"Rubbish!"

"It isn't rubbish, old man—seek and ye shall find!"

Somebody laughed, and then the voices grew more and more remote, till their sound died away. Spartak took a chair next to Vadim.

"Well?" he said impatiently. "Out with it!"

Vadim briefly recounted what Valya Gruzinova had told him. Spartak's face clouded over, and he began sniffing. He always sniffed when absorbed in unpleasant or complicated meditations.

"And *will* there be a baby?" he asked, bringing the words out in jerks.

"There won't be—I told you. But that's not the point."

"Of course not."

He let his head droop and maintained a long silence, biting the nail of his little finger.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he at last brought out. "Palavin! But that's only one thing. Where does the careerism come in?"

"I'll tell you where! In my opinion careerism and selfishness are the two sides of the same medal. Don't you see that if a man's such a self-seeker in his private life he can't be sincere in his social life? Can't you see the connection?"

"Of course I can. But you know. . ."

"What?"

"It's a nasty business. And it's very complicated. Moral questions, the ethics of youth are most important things, of course, and they touch us closely. But you've got to be very careful how you handle them. It means encroaching on a man's private life, doesn't it? And you

can only do that after a great deal of thought, and if you're very sure of yourself. It mustn't be made to appear as if comrades from the Komsomol Bureau can interfere in each other's private lives whenever they like. Might not people see it in that light?"

"People might see anything in any light."

"That's the trouble, you see! We must be able to prove that we had a right to interfere in his private life, that we were obliged to. Let's just think. . . ." He narrowed his eyes and spoke slowly, tensely, as if mentally weighing every word. "Well: he seduced a girl, promising to marry her. But he never married her. He behaved basely. Well. . . . Wait a bit, though, that's rot! Mere prattle! It wasn't like that a bit—it was ever so much more complicated. It wasn't like that, and we can't talk rubbish like that. Yes, but. . . . Do you trust that Gruzina?"

"I do," said Vadim firmly. "I've known her a long time and consider that, if anything, she has understated the case."

"That's not to her credit, either."

"She's an extremely reserved person, Spartak. It cost her a lot to tell me. Naturally. . . ."

"Well. Can she be got hold of?"

"Valya!" Vadim thought a moment. "She wouldn't come. Oh, but of course she's not here. She left for Kharkov."

"Because of this unhappy love affair?"

"She was given an assignment."

"I see."

Spartak sighed, squeezed his head between the palms of his hands. Again he fell to thinking, and this time the sniffing went on for a long period.

"What a situation!" he said, with a short laugh, looking half-interrogatively at Vadim. "Here's a man—respected by all, holder of the scholarship, an active worker, clever, and all that, and suddenly. . . everything

goes phut! A chance discovery, a single detail from real life, and that man suddenly goes up in the air like an empty husk with his talents and his erudition, and all that. . . . You know what struck me most—his saying: 'I must consult my mother.' That's where he exposed himself—eh? I know how he consults his mamma. And of course, the whole thing's extremely ignoble, base. . . . M-m-m . . . very unpleasant!"

And Spartak, wrinkling up his face as if in pain, scratched the back of his head. "You know what—it puts one against a fellow! But one can't base an accusation on that, Vadim. We need facts. And where are they?"

"You said yourself he had behaved ignobly, Spartak."

"I know I did, but I'm not sure. She's a grown-up person—she knew what she was doing. Didn't she? Perhaps, after all, he did love her and really did mean to marry her. And then when he got to know her better, she turned out—well, let's say a rotter, and his love passed, and he went away. It could be that, couldn't it? Of course it could! And if we start interrogating him, that's precisely what he'll say. And just try and prove him a liar! We shall only make fools of ourselves. And the girl isn't even in Mόscow. Don't you see? . . ."

"Spartak, I want. . . ."

"Wait a minute! You do understand how unpleasant it is to raise such questions, don't you? I know of a case when immoral actions were discussed at Komsomol committees and general meetings. Not here—at another institute. The year before last it was. A chap was expelled from the Komsomol for going with a girl who had a baby from him. But this was much worse—he tried to make her get rid of it, and when she wouldn't he deserted her and the child. He was expelled, and quite rightly. But that was quite different. There's nothing of that in Palavin's case."

Vadim said nothing, looking obstinately down. Then he transferred his gaze to Spartak and slowly shook his head.

"No. That's not it a bit. For me, personally, his conduct with Valya is only the last touch to his portrait. It's like this: for a long time I couldn't make up my mind about him. And when I did, I said nothing at first. You say yourself he's got swelled head. But I tell you it's more than that. I've seen his attitude to his work at the Institute—why, he simply despises our Institute and all of us because, you know, we're only future teachers—commonplace, uncreative people—the mediocre small fry. And what made him choose our Institute? Simply because against such a dull background his light would shine all the brighter, and he could make a career for himself. Haven't you noticed how he's always one of the last to take his exams—so as to be among the weakest of all? I saw the way he got his scholarship, and there's no denying he got it less for his abilities as a student than for other qualities. I could see that. I saw how he got round Kozelsky, and you, and all of us. He managed to get something out of us all. It would be impossible to understand that unless you studied him thoroughly..."

"Listen!" Spartak leaped suddenly to his feet. "You've opened my eyes!"

"Perhaps what I'm doing doesn't look well—he was rather franker with me than with anyone else. And I was too lazy to argue with him. I was sarcastic when I ought to have banged on the table. I have been much to blame. But now, you see. . . . Now it's too late for a private talk. It has to be a serious talk, with everybody taking part. Then, perhaps, something might come of it. I still think we needn't consider him absolutely hopeless, need we?"

"I tell you what," said Spartak with sudden decision. "We'll call a closed meeting of the Bureau. The day after tomorrow."

By Wednesday the whole department had heard of the incident at the S.R.S. meeting. Many came up to Vadim, asking him: "What happened?" Vadim silenced them briefly, not to say rudely. He did not wish to talk about the whole thing, even to his most intimate friends. But he could see how these same inquisitive persons went up to Palavin, and how willingly he went into lengthy explanations with them.

The whole day Vadim went about, outwardly calm, inwardly under a severe strain. He noticed that some of the students were glancing at him with hostility or mockery, while others were offended by his refusal to speak. Lena Medovskaya passed him with averted eyes, an expression of intense scorn on her face. No doubt many were already more or less aware of the essence of the question to come before the Bureau. Raya and Lagodenko knew it as well as Spartak, and they had told somebody else, who had set the ball rolling. . . .

During the interval Remeshkov came up to Vadim and asked him, in mock alarm:

"What's this I hear—are you advocating immaculate conception, old boy?"

"Ass!" exclaimed Vadim, blushing furiously.

"No, but seriously—what's up?"

"I'll speak seriously tomorrow. Leave me alone, can't you?"

Lusya Voronkova was in ecstasy over all that had happened and all that was brewing. She was always whispering in someone's ear: "Sergei and Vadim have had a tremendous row! Goodness knows what will happen!" It was doubtful whether she would survive till Thursday, or die in the night of curiosity. But Vadim thought that most of the students felt less warmly disposed towards Palavin than before. Andrei and Max did not put any questions, seeing that Vadim did not wish to speak. Lagodenko squeezed his hand as if

unintentionally: "Full steam ahead, old man! We'll back you up!"

After lectures Vadim went to the Lenin Library and worked without once getting up till it closed—at eleven o'clock. He worked as never before that day, finishing his whole paper in rough. About a week would go on finishing touches, and recopying, and the work would be done. In the library he had scarcely thought of Palavin. But in the trolley bus, which takes a quarter of an hour to cover the space between the library and Kaluzhskaya Square, thoughts of the morrow pursued him like a pack of hounds unleashed. He pressed his forehead against the window, changed his seat several times, and suddenly, without rhyme or reason, jumped off two stops before his destination.

He was worrying about tomorrow more than he had ever worried about the hardest exams.

His mother had returned from the sanatorium a few days before. Vadim could not help wishing she could have postponed her return till all this business with Sergei should be over. He would have preferred to spend the evening by himself.

"Why so late?" asked Vera Fadeyevna, opening the door to him. "Have you been at the plant again?"

"No. I've been at the library."

"There's been somebody waiting for you here. She waited and waited, and made conversation, and at last she couldn't wait any longer, and went away. She's been gone half an hour."

"Who was it?" asked Vadim cautiously. The unpleasant thought that it might have been Lena flitted across his mind. "It wasn't Lena, was it?"

"No, no, somebody a little older. It was Irina Victorovna."

"Oh!" said Vadim, and taking off his coat, he went straight into the bathroom. "What a good thing I didn't

find her here," he said to himself as he washed his hands. "I wonder what her mission was?"

When he sat down to the supper table, however, Vadim did not ask anything. He waited for his mother to tell him herself. But Vera Fadeyevna confined her attention to his supper: had she put in enough salt, and wouldn't he like some mustard?

"I'm glad to see you eat up your supper. Irina Victorovna hardly touched anything. I was afraid it wasn't nice. . . ."

When he had finished eating and lit a cigarette, Vadim at last asked:

"What did she say?"

"She talked a lot, ever such a lot," replied Vera Fadeyevna, wagging her head. "She was deathly pale when she came—she looked awful. I wondered what could have happened. It seems you're getting up something against Sergei—you've quarrelled, and you're supposed to have threatened to speak against him at the Komsomol Bureau. She was almost in tears, you know. I was quite embarrassed. I didn't know how to console her. And I had no idea what it was all about."

"Did she say anything about Valya?"

"Yes, oh yes, she did!"

"What did she say?"

"She said she was an educated girl, but one of those . . . well, who'd let a man go all lengths. At least that's how I understood her. She said she had been against the friendship from the first, but she never stood in Sergei's way. Well, they got friendly, and went about together, and then they parted."

"And did she say why?"

She said they got tired of one another. And she was very glad, because she didn't consider Valya good enough for him. She said she had a bad temper and her health wasn't good, and her people were not very cultured."

"She's a narrow-minded woman. Don't you know that, Mother?"

"I've known her twenty years, my boy. But..." Vera Fadeyevna shot a cautious glance at Vadim, "...since everything ended more or less satisfactorily—it did, didn't it?—is it worth raking it all up again? I can't help thinking..."

"What d'you mean, more or less satisfactorily?"

"Well, with no particular consequence, or tragedy..."

Vadim smiled and closed his eyes. He felt an unconquerable weariness and desire for sleep.

"Well, no one committed suicide, and no babies were drowned, if that's what you mean. It ended all right for him, of course. He's as gay and healthy and free as ever. What could be more satisfactory? But for her it's a tragedy."

Vadim opened his eyes and straightened himself. His voice was loud and irritable, because he was at once sleepy and anxious to justify himself in his mother's eyes. "A real tragedy, and it's all his fault."

"I blame the girl to a great extent. In my day girls could look after themselves better."

"What do you blame her for? For believing him, for loving him? That woman has been working at you—she can think of nothing but her precious offspring, and you are trying to do what you promised her. You promised to influence me, to dissuade me—didn't you? You may as well admit it!"

"I didn't promise anything!" said Vera Fadeyevna angrily. "I'm saying what I think. I can see it wasn't so serious, but it could do Sergei a lot of harm. After all, he's your comrade. You grew up and went to school together... And our families have known each other so many years. You could have brought him here, we'd have scolded him within an inch of his life. And now you're making a public affair of it..."

"Yes, I am to blame," said Vadim. "I am to blame for never once having had a serious talk with him. And now the time has come. And I must be the most ruthless of all precisely because I am his old comrade. That's all."

"You're very hard, Vadim," said Vera Fadeyevna, after a pause. "Well—you must do as you think best. . . ."

She went out of the room. When she came back Vadim had already made his bed up for the night. But when he lay under the bedclothes sleep would not come. Vera Fadeyevna put out the light, and still he could not sleep. It was dark in the room, and dark outside. The only point of light came from his father's watch, the dial of which gleamed like a glowworm.

Suddenly Vadim felt a desire to get out his old diaries and remind himself of Sergei as he had once been, not his "old schoolmate," but simply Sergei, alias "Cakes." Vadim had several school diaries and one which he had kept while at the front. They were all thrown higgledy-piggledy with old letters, newspaper cuttings and the like in the bottom drawer of his desk. Vadim got out of bed and switched on the table lamp.

Here was the very first diary—a thick exercise book in a faded brown cover, with the inscription in water colours, "My Life," surrounded by drawings of steamers, spidery palms, mountain peaks and the planet, Saturn.

"1936. July 7. Today is my birthday. I am twelve years old. All the kids from our yard came and brought me presents. Then we played bat, two at a time. I only lost to Shura, I won from all the rest. Sergei lost to me, too. He says he did it on purpose, because it was my birthday. But he was as red as a lobster from trying to win. Then we flew a kite. It was made from maps.

"1938. August 13. Went to bathe in the Gabai, the bottom's good there, and there's a nice beach. Sergei and I swam to the other side. Zina was with us, she swims very well, only she squeals and giggles all the time as if

somebody was tickling her. We got out on to the bank. There was a big meadow, green as emeralds. On the way back I fell behind. They got out on to the shore and ran about to dry themselves. I shouted to Sergei to draw his attention and pointed to the place I wanted him to take my clothes to. And he jumped right into the water from the bank and did the crawl-stroke up to me. I laughed and shouted to him but he took no notice. He swam up and took me by the arm and I went on laughing. He thought I was drowning. He's my very best friend.

"August 15. I didn't know Zina was fifteen. Sergei said if she lived in Africa she would have had lots of children by now. I don't believe him.

"1938. December 10. There was a party at the Young Pioneers' House last night, and some boys from Spain were there. There was a thin dark boy, like Misha Schwartz he was, and he told us about the struggle between the Republicans and the fascist bandits. He spoke Spanish, and a woman interpreted. Then there was an exhibition of the art studio I work in. It was dedicated to the fighters of Republican Spain. I painted a picture of the battle of Teruel. Anton Dmitrievich said the painting and the expressions were good, but he said, palms were not typical of Spain (laurels would have been better). Sergei was at the party too, with his dramatic circle. They acted a piece from Republican life, and Sergei took the chief part—Comrade Juan.

"1939. December 8. We have moved to a new flat in Kaluzhskaya Street. It's a new six-storey house and the flat is better than our old one, but I didn't like leaving the school and my friends. Of course, Sergei and I will often see each other. Last year we hiked along Lake Seliger, and next summer we want to go to the Caucasus. I do gymnastics every morning now and give myself a cold rubdown. I must get into training for the expedition, the way Amundsen did. . . .

"1940. April 10. There was a party at Sergei's last night. All our old school friends were there. Masha's grown very tall, she's in the ballet school. She taught me to dance. It was great fun. Sergei read his poetry aloud (very good, only a little imitative). Then we got Oslo over the short wave. We heard a German say the fascist troops had occupied the capital of Norway. 'You are listening to the marching of a victorious army!' And we really did hear the noise of boots marching over an asphalt road... thud-thud-thud, and then the rolling of a drum. Then someone shouted in a bass voice: '*Sprechen Sie deutsch?*' and a squeaky voice answered '*Jawohl! Jawohl!*' The blackguards! They are winning so far, because they are attacking people weaker than themselves.

"1941. June 22. War! Tonight the Germans attacked our country. At the airdrome across the river, airplane engines have been humming all day. No time to write—we're digging a bomb shelter in the yard....

"August 13. Another raid. I'm getting used to them. No letter from Father for ages.

"August 30. Sergei and I are 'in the Youth Fire Brigade.

"September 10. A fire started in the attic the night before last—it was caused by an incendiary bomb. Sergei and I ran up. He fell and cut his hand on a piece of rusty iron. The blood simply spouted out. He wouldn't go and have it seen to till we had sprinkled sand on the flames...."

This was the last entry before he entered the Army. In 1941 Sergei and he began to lead separate lives, neither of them knowing anything about the other, except that they were both alive and well, living somewhere, doing something....

The school diaries had not afforded much food for thought, either. Anyhow not to Vadim, for whom they

were like tiny fragments of a broken mirror, incapable of reflecting more than the merest fraction of his prewar life. There were no signs of those traits which had developed so violently, so unpleasantly by the age of twenty-four.

Vadim tried to recall various incidents from his prewar friendship with Sergei, tried to remember what had been Sergei's attitude to his comrades, to girls, to his people, to Irina Victorovna. And here probably was the weakest spot. Sergei's home life had always seemed very strange to Vadim. There had been something wrong, something awkward about it. His parents were always quarrelling, his father leaving them, every now and then, and coming back again. Vadim remembered him as a tall, stout, morose man, never smiling and seldom speaking. He was like a stranger in his own home. And Sergei's mother was always astonishing Vadim by her absurd actions. She obeyed her son's slightest whim, and yet was always making scenes over the merest trifles. Sergei for some reason used to call her "the kipper." At the time, this had seemed the height of wit to Vadim. But now he realized that foolish, weak-willed Irina Victorovna, with her hysterically self-sacrificing love for her son and blind faith in his genius, had had a great influence on Sergei's character. Vadim remembered Chekhov had something about this in one of his notebooks. He took down a volume of Chekhov from the shelf, and looked for the place till he at last found it. "In families where the mother is a philistine the sons are likely to grow up Panamists, sharpers, and hopeless rotters." If Sergei had not become a finished swindler or a hopeless rotter, it was because he was surrounded by healthy people and by a life of broad vistas. He had become a petty swindler. And there would be a serious talk about that tomorrow.

Vadim put out the light and went back to bed. He began thinking of the next day, trying to imagine what he would say at the Bureau, Sergei's replies and what the others would say.

For a moment he was overcome by a feeling of shameful, wretched uncertainty. Ought he to have started all this, rousing the whole department? Perhaps he ought to have tried to have a serious talk with Sergei alone. Perhaps he was altogether wrong somewhere. . . . Perhaps it was all quite different, much more complicated, unintelligible. . . .

It was long past midnight when, tired out and anxious, he at last fell into a heavy sleep.

Chapter 26

On their arrival at the Institute the next day the students read the following announcement on the bulletin board:

"At 7 p. m. today there will be a meeting of the third-year Komsomol Bureau. Comrades Palavin and Belov are required to attend. Attendance of Group Organizers compulsory. Komsomol Bureau, Third Year."

There was to be a test match between the scratch volleyball team of the Pedagogical Institute and the Medical. The volleyball team met in the gym after lectures. The coach, Vasili Adamovich, a veteran volleyball player, lean, round-shouldered, loose-limbed and active, was giving his team final instruction and admonition. Rashid, playing fourth man for the first time, showed signs of nervousness.

Just as everyone was getting ready to go, Palavin appeared in the doorway.

"How do, Vasilil!" he cried, strolling up to Vasili Adamovich and holding out his hand. "Hullo, boys!"

He shook hands all round, but made as if he had not seen Vadim.

"Good evening," said Vasili Adamovich dryly.

"Are we off?"

"We're off, I don't know about you."

"I'm off, too. I'm in top form today," said Palavin with a laugh. "We'll be able to give them a good drubbing in three hours, won't we? I've got a Bureau meeting at seven—must be back."

"Come on, then, you can cheer for your side."

"What? What's that you said, Vasili Adamovich?" asked Palavin, raising one brow in comic astonishment. "Did I hear you right?"

"You won't be playing today," said Vasili Adamovich. "You never showed up for practice games, and it would be risky to have you in the team after such a long break in training. You can come along as a reserve if you like."

"Me a reserve!" echoed Palavin, visibly taken aback for a moment. "Can you see me going as a reserve? You don't really mean it, do you, Vasili?"

Vasili Adamovich looked at his watch.

"Get ready, fellows."

Palavin glanced round. The players were putting on their coats, packing their sports cases, exchanging sober monosyllables, and trying not to look at Palavin.

"Well now! Which of you is fourth man?"

"They put me..." said Rashid, glancing shyly at the coach.

"You needn't apologize!" barked Vasili Adamovich. "You've been chosen and you'll play. And you'll play well, mind you."

Palavin patted Rashid on the shoulder.

"Go it, Nuraliyev, go it! You're just the right height for treating them to smashes. All right then—good luck to you! Forget my existence!"

He went out of the gym brandishing his sports case.

"Aren't we grand!" said Vasili Adamovich. "We'd have forgotten you, anyhow. Who does he think he is?"

But he had obviously been hurt by Palavin's last words. The whole way to the Medical Institute Vasili Adamovich kept preaching the virtue of modesty, and the evil of conceit. He was a moralizing coach, considering it his duty not merely to give his charges the benefit of his volleyball technique, but also to instil in them principles of correct conduct.

"'Forget my existence!' What does he mean by that?" Vasili Adamovich was quiet and dignified even in his indignation. "It means a man thinks only of himself and doesn't care a rap for the collective. Bad sportsmanship. Volleyball is a game that calls for teamwork. One man is just a cipher—six men are a force. That's what you must remember. He was always like that. When he played second, he tried to hit the ball without passing it on to the fourth—even if he had to use his left hand for it."

Vadim was amused to hear the character of Palavin appraised from the point of view of sport. He was almost as nervous as Rashid today. But it was not the coming match which made him nervous—he had played against the Medical Institute in the first round, and knew that they were not dangerous opponents.

All was ready for the match in the gym hall of the Medical Institute. The fans were clamouring impatiently from the long low benches set round the volleyball court. The medical students put up a keen resistance in the first game, and proved hard to beat. The next game was more lively. Rashid had gained confidence, dealing powerful precise strokes and playing better than he had during training. It was easy to play next to him: he did not swear over a bad pass, like Palavin.

The second game ended in defeat for the Medical Institute.

And thus the Pedagogical Institute team proved victorious in the second round.

When the match was over, Vadim suddenly caught sight of Palavin among the onlookers. "Why did he come?" wondered Vadim. "It's not like him. Could it have been that he was sure we would lose without his invaluable assistance, and wanted to rejoice over our defeat? Well, let him rejoice over our victory!"

Vadim made for the shower. Emerging ten minutes later brisk and refreshed, striking a match in anticipation of a smoke, his eyes fell on Palavin, anxiously sauntering up and down past the door.

"I was waiting for you," he told Vadim as soon as he caught sight of him. Then he frowned.

"What's up?"

"Come over here!"

The gym was almost empty. Vasili Adamovich and the Medical Institute's coach were seated at a table, chatting in low tones, and a few students were taking turns at the horizontal bar at the other end of the hall. Vadim and Palavin went over to a window in the corner.

"Was my mother at your place yesterday?" asked Palavin dryly, making an effort to be matter of fact.

"She was."

"What did she come for?"

"I don't know—ask her!"

"H'm!" Palavin gave a nervous laugh. "Please don't think I sent her!"

Vadim said nothing. Somehow he felt that Palavin was trying to make things up.

"Please don't think that!" repeated Palavin. "I only heard of it today. The old goose had to put her oar in, nobody asked her."

"It's all the same to me whether you sent her or not," said Vadim after a pause.

"But it's not all the same to me! It's not all the same to me whether my mother's a fool or not!"

"That's not what he means," thought Vadim. "And that's not what he wants to say. . . ."

"It was all because of her, really, that this business with Valya arose."

"Was it?"

"She was always making much of her, marvelling over her, bringing her to the house, accepting favours. And what for? All because of her feminine curiosity, her idiotic maternal desire to have her son's love affair going under her eyes. You know I. . ." He fixed his gaze on Vadim's chin and continued in a plangent, injured voice: "I had made up my mind long before to break off relations completely—I felt nothing good would come of it all. But no, she would keep inviting her, making use of her. And Valya helped her with the housekeeping, and the old silly took everything for granted. . . ."

"But you took everything for granted too, didn't you?"

"Me? I was in love with her. There was a definite period when I really loved her."

"Oh, yes. A quite definite period."

"So there you are," interrupted Palavin. "I wished to inform you in the first place that I never sent any envoys to you. That's one thing. And secondly I wanted to warn you, simply because I have some friendly feelings left for you, that if you raise the question of Valya now you'll make yourself the laughingstock of the department. You're spreading absurd, trivial gossip, and you'll pay for it. I give you warning!"

"And I give you warning that Valya is not the only subject I shall raise."

"Indeed! What else is there? Perhaps you'll mention my asking you for a crib at the exams."

"All right, it's time to go."

"Come on!" agreed Palavin, with a resolute nod.

Vadim hardly heard a word of what was said during the first quarter of an hour at the meeting of the Bureau. It seemed to him that the others, too, were trying to get over the ordinary business in a hurry and turn to the important matter. At last Spartak said:

"We were to have discussed another application for a recommendation to enter the Party—the application of Palavin. At the last meeting of the S.R.S., however, when Palavin's name came up as a candidate. . ." Spartak spoke at great length in excruciatingly even tones, and then all of a sudden almost shouted as he jerked out: "There is a motion to hear what Belov has to say."

No other motions were forthcoming. During the first quarter of an hour Vadim had had time to think, and had decided to speak from his place, so as to have the members of the Bureau in front of him. But now, when he rose, he went right up to the table where Spartak was sitting, facing the group organizers and Palavin.

"At the S.R.S. meeting I objected to Palavin's candidature. I said his moral conduct makes him unfit to represent our group. It is now for me to prove those words." Vadim listened to his own voice in astonishment, it sounded so loud and solemn. After a slight pause he went on in a lower voice. "I will not speak today of any particular act of Palavin's, but of his conduct as a whole. Palavin and I have been what they call 'friends since childhood.' So I probably know him better than anyone else here.

"I am bound to say that in his private and social life Palavin does not behave as a Komsomol member should. You ask for facts?" Again Vadim raised his voice. He could not turn his gaze from Palavin, and even lowered his head, the better to catch his eye. "Well, here they are, roughly: when Lagodenko's conduct was discussed at the Komsomol meeting, Palavin hotly defended Kozelsky, though most of the meeting criticized the pro-

fessor. Why did he defend him? Could it have been that he disagreed with the criticism on principle? No, that was not it. He had often said just the same things about Kozelsky, only still more outspokenly; to me and others he made merciless fun of him. But at that time he needed Kozelsky's support in the S.R.S., where he was to read a paper. And Palavin really did manage to 'make friends' with Kozelsky, though the friendship was short-lived. As soon as Palavin began to feel that things were looking bad for Kozelsky and that there was more likelihood of deriving unpleasantness than benefits from his influence, he became one of Kozelsky's most zealous expositors, was eager to speak at the Council of Studies and so on and so forth. It seems to me there's more careerism than magnanimity in this.

"He has behaved in the same way in other cases, too. Everyone will remember what an ardent social worker he became in December, what a noise he made about contacts with the plant! How he even went there once with us, made a conquest of Kuznetsov and promised marvels . . . and how abruptly it all came to an end! He never went near the place again. And what made him go there in the first place? The same old reason—his own advantage. In the first place he wanted to win the approval of the Bureau, and secondly, to 'take notes' for his novel.

"And what is his attitude towards the Institute, to his future profession? Does he mean to become a teacher? Not he! That's for the mediocre, for those who have no talent, for failures. Then again—has he any real friends? All his friends may be classified under the headings of his personal requirements. Remeshkov is his 'photographic' friend, Kaplin is the friend reserved for literary conversation; he has friends among seniors, for parties and for going to the parks. Then there are 'library friends,' 'theatre friends,' 'volleyball friends,' and so on. I myself come under the heading of a 'childhood friend.' And he

probably subjects his girl friends to an equally strict classification.

"You may wonder why I, who have known Palavin so long, have only raised the question of his character now, at the end of the third year. It was precisely my post as 'childhood friend' which got in my way. I often argued with him, but never on serious matters. I consider I am chiefly to blame for tolerating his faults. I mean. . . . In a word, I never once had a serious talk with him, and now. . . . I have been induced to raise the question after what I heard from an old friend of Palavin's—I don't know what heading she came under. This is what she told me."

Vadim repeated Valya's story word for word, trying to be as impartial and concise as possible. Fyodor Andreyevich Krylov and Levchuk had come into the room at the beginning of Vadim's speech and were now seated on a sofa. All listened attentively, each reacting individually. Spartak, now knitting his brows, now signifying his approval in a series of quick nods, now looking guardedly at Vadim, his black arched eyebrows raised, his lips moving as if he were trying to put the words into Vadim's mouth. Marina Gravets, spreading her elbows, placed one fist upon the other, and, her chin on the top, gazed steadily at Vadim's face as if listening to a fascinating story. But Vadim, looking sideways from beneath lowered brows, could see no one but Palavin, whose roving glance he tried in vain to catch. Palavin kept changing his attitude every minute. At first he looked indifferent, yawning and cleaning out his pipe with a match. Then, like an absent-minded student who had suddenly decided to listen to the lecturer, he heaved a deep sigh, and, propping his head on his hand, looked with interest at Vadim. After a while he raised his head, dropped his hands on to his knees, and sat with his mouth half-open, listening with amazement. Every now and then he

knitted his brows, sat up belligerently, as if he were going to speak, but restrained himself, and relaxed his pose. Drawing himself up again, he cast quick glances all round. His face grew suddenly red, and his forehead glistened—he drew a handkerchief out of his pocket, but only wiped his chin with it.

As soon as Vadim had finished talking about Valya, Palavin asked:

“Well—what of it?”

“I know,” said Vadim, looking at Palavin, “that Palavin can deny everything. There are no witnesses. Valya herself is not here. But that’s not the point. This isn’t a trial. What Valya told me—and I believe every word she said—only added the crowning touch. The portrait is complete. We are discussing here the conduct of a certain person, his character, his life. I am sure others have something to say about that. We must have it all out now, before. . .” he knitted his brows and uttered the last words hurriedly: “before it’s too late. I’m sure he can be made to understand. He isn’t hopeless. . . . At least that’s what I think. . . .”

“Thanks,” said Palavin. “Now I’d like to speak!”

“Have you done, Belov?”

“Yes. For the present.”

Vadim sat down, and Palavin rose at once, without waiting for Spartak to ask him to.

“I accuse Belov!” he said quickly. “I accuse him of malicious libel! Yes, it’s I who am the accuser today, not he. . . .”

“Stick to essentials,” said Spartak, knitting his brows. “We’ll decide that.”

“Let me speak, Comrade Galustyan. Don’t hurry me, please! Well then—Belov has managed to get hold of certain facts bearing on my—shall we say—unfortunate love affair. And now he is trying to work up a regular case from these few facts, a dirty scandal. And he has done

his best to see that the dirt shall stick to me. I know why he is doing this. And I am amazed that the Bureau, under the guise of discussing my so-called social attitude, consents to listen to ridiculous gossip of this sort. I am amazed at the unscrupulousness of the Bureau—put that in the record, please! Have you nothing else to discuss—is everything going so well, all problems solved?”

Spartak tapped on the table with a slender brown finger.

“Palavin, you’re called upon to speak of yourself, not of the Bureau. Answer Belov to the point.”

Palavin looked at Spartak, then turned his gaze on Vadim and the members of the Bureau, and suddenly sat down.

“I refuse to answer.”

“You refuse to answer the Komsomol Bureau?” asked Spartak after a pause.

“Yes! Because you have no reason for interfering in my private affairs.... It’s mere vulgar curiosity....”

“Wait a minute, Palavin!” said Spartak, rising and frowning resolutely. “Don’t try and reduce it all to the affair with Valya. You’re dodging, Sergei! Belov was talking of your general conduct in the Institute, of your attitude towards professors, comrades, girls—that was his theme. Are you going to answer?”

Palavin shook his head.

“All right,” Spartak said after a pause. “You don’t wish to speak now, but you will afterwards. Who wants to speak?”

Gortsev, member of the Bureau’s economic sector, took the floor. He spoke slowly, with exasperating pauses, and all the while he was talking he kept touching his face; rubbing his pale forehead with his fingers, stroking his throat gently, twisting a lock of fair hair round one finger.... He, too, had noticed that Palavin employed a wrong, uncomradely style. He had not thought all the iriv-

ial facts which characterized this style could be discussed before a meeting of the Bureau. But now he saw it might do Palavin good. The Komsomol meeting at which Lagodenko was criticized for his rudeness, bragging ways and unruliness had proved a help to him. Lagodenko had changed considerably since, changed for the better. . . .

"His marriage has steadied him," someone suggested facetiously.

"No—he realized many things, and he took the criticism in the right spirit. Palavin's case is a more complicated one, and his faults are of a graver nature. His affair with that girl. . . . Of course, it's hard to get at the bottom of that, since Palavin refuses to talk. Probably his conduct was not altogether unimpeachable. Probably it wasn't. But the fact that he refuses to speak. . . ."

"I'll speak at the District Committee!" barked out Palavin. "I'll speak about you all, and about Belov too. . . ."

Nina Fokina and Marina took the floor. They both spoke eagerly and at length, but though they were wholly on his side, Vadim thought their speeches as vague and unconvincing as Gortsev's had been. Of course, they were indignant with Palavin, spoke words full of wrath, demanded that a severe reprimand and warning be given him, but Vadim felt that all they really cared for was Palavin's conduct in the affair with Valya. And this lowered the level of the discussion and gave Sergei a chance to justify himself.

As soon as Marina stopped speaking, Palavin asked for the floor.

"I will speak after all," he said, with a resolute shake of his head. "You shan't exult in my silence. I see my entire personality is being discussed here. People seem to be hurt that I take no part in the discussion. . . . I like that!" Palavin gave a nervous laugh. "If you are hoping for savoury details, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. All I can say is that I simply sweep away the accusation

. about Valya. You have no grounds for accusing me of immoral conduct in regard to her. None whatever! You have no facts. Belov's words are mere words, and nothing more. Loud, empty words. 'Oh, how wrong, how immoral!' What was wrong? What was immoral? After all, he didn't say what harm I did to Valya. He didn't, because he couldn't. Because all that passed between us two—Valya and myself—concerns the two of us, and no one else. And I shall say nothing more on that head. Of course, private life merges with social life. But that does not mean that private life should be wholly swallowed up by social life, that it should be dissolved in it. No! There is a line between them, and beware of stepping over it without very good reason. I will not be experimented with!" Now he was talking very loudly, and energetically waving his fist, as if he meant to hit himself on the jaw.

"You deny all Belov has told us?"

"What?" For a second Palavin was silent, looking fixedly at Spartak, then he started talking still louder: "Do I deny it? Yes, I protest against his tone, his offensive manner . . . this, so to say . . . this mixture of superciliousness and hypocrisy! Did you hear what Belov considers his main fault? His main fault he considers, you see. . . ." Palavin gave an excited laugh, ". . . to have put up with my faults for such a long time! How d'you like that? I think it's wonderful!"

Vadim noticed that Spartak gave an involuntary smile, then frowned quickly to conceal it, as he said sternly:

"Stop quibbling! He didn't mean it like that. . . ."

"Oh, yes he did! That's just what he meant! Belov himself has no faults, it's quite impossible he should have any. How could he? He's a paragon of virtue. His only care is the curing of other people's faults. And in the pursuance of this noble vocation he missed something, he

erred. . . . Too bad!" Palavin linked his fingers and shook his head solicitously. "If that is not superciliousness and smugness, what is? What is it but infernal, inveterate conceit? And this same man, this so-called childhood friend who, it appears, has been deceiving me all his life, playing the hypocrite—I thought he was honest with me, a true friend, while he was only 'putting up with my faults'—this man dares to accuse me of baseness, of immoral conduct! Can such as he understand the complexity and depth of my relations with Valya? Can he, this paragon, this worthy member of the 'Salvation Army', understand what it cost me to part with Valya? That I, too, have my feelings? But I didn't mean to dwell on that. I made up my mind I wouldn't. To make a long story short, this is what I think: Belov's speech is a specimen of clumsy hypocrisy all through, and another time I might have merely laughed at it. But I must keep a straight face in order to explain and prove things. Perhaps that'll do."

Palavin sat down, heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction, and began filling his pipe. Vadim felt that Palavin's speech had made an impression. There was a pause: everyone seemed embarrassed and at a loss what to say. Vadim himself was astounded at the cleverness with which Palavin had managed to defend himself and at the same time make him, Vadim, appear ridiculous.

His brows contracted, his face burning, Vadim sat with lowered head, furiously wondering where he had erred in his speech. What had he left out? Why did the words, which had seemed so scathing only yesterday, sound so unconvincing today?

Group Organizer Pichugina was discoursing meanwhile about the "practical impossibility of proving that Palavin's conduct towards that girl had been immoral. There are many sides in the intimate life of each of us which are missed by an outsider, shades which are hard

to define—trifling in themselves, but in reality very significant. Was it her he deceived, after all? Perhaps he had deceived himself—had been in love, had idealized the object of his affections, and then came cruel disillusionment. We cannot tell. We can only surmise.”

“So you’re an agnostic, you consider Palavin’s deeds beyond the grasp of mind?” Spartak interrupted her morosely. “That won’t do, Comrade Pichugina. Let’s not deal with details, but with essentials—Palavin’s egoism, his shallowness, superciliousness, and the manner in which he displayed these traits.”

Vadim could see that Spartak, too, notwithstanding his brisk businesslike tone, was somewhat at a loss, irritated at the way the discussion was dwindling into empty conjectures and useless analysis. Palavin was beginning to take a “self-critical” part in the discussion.

“Well, what are my chief faults?” he said, now quite calm. “Say I do envy other people, their success, say I’m a little touchy, proud perhaps. Perhaps I am used to being first wherever I am, to considering myself more gifted than others. I don’t deny I have my faults! It would be strange if I hadn’t. I’m a human being, not an angel or a Belov. But the question is, how should these faults be discussed? In a just, friendly way, or maliciously, with the intention to insult, mortify. . . .”

“D’you mean that was how I spoke?” cried Vadim, unable to restrain himself any longer.

Palavin nodded, looking past him.

“More or less. You had one desire— to throw mud at me, to soil my reputation.”

“You’ve soiled it yourself! And you’re doing it now!” Ignoring all order, Vadim began speaking rapidly, with unexpected force and fervour: “I know you think it’s to my advantage to discredit you, to get you out of the way so as to push to the front myself! But do you remember once telling me that I didn’t know people? You’re con-

vinced *you* do! But you don't, really. You judge others by yourself, you see your own qualities in them—self-interest, greed, the wish to have your own way at all costs. The idea that people might be governed by other motives has never entered your head. Whenever you find any one acting on higher motives you call them hypocrites, prudes, or fools only deserving of ridicule. . . . No, no! It's you who don't know people!"

"Words, words, words . . ." muttered Palavin.

"Words?" echoed Vadim. "You're not to be convinced by words, I know; it's hard to drive you into a corner. You haven't actually broken any law, you haven't performed any really dark deed. You've always known where to draw the line. You're as slippery as an eel. 'Try and prove it! What harm have I done Valya?' It is hard to explain in a few words. But if one gives one's mind to it, it can be done. Words simple enough could be found to explain the sorrow you have brought the girl. You have undermined one of the most precious human feelings—her self-confidence, her self-respect. What can her own attitude to herself be when she sees the attitude of others? When she sees that she can be deceived with impunity, when she is made to feel she's not good enough, and must be thankful for anything you throw her . . . when she can be callously abandoned, and as callously returned to, whenever you feel like it. . . . You have undermined her faith in herself and in others. And that, Palavin, is the crime for which you will have to answer here.

"And in just the same way, if one chose to analyze it, one could say exactly 'what harm you did' in the Kozelsky affair, or 'what harm you have done' to me or any one else. But I won't dwell on this. Something bigger is under discussion—the proper attitude to life. Should we cherish work, real work, feelings, friendship, love—fight for them incessantly, undismayed by difficulties, even at the risk of appearing ridiculous sometimes? Or is it

enough—as you seem to think—to pay mere lip service to all these things, while in our hearts we sneer at them and go our own way—the easy, comfortable way that suits us best? Should we content ourselves with fakes—they're often less trouble than the real thing—with lukewarm emotions, convenient loves, pinchbeck friendships? And love passionately only one object, work with all one's heart and soul and talents, grudging neither time nor energy, for only one thing—one's own self, one's own future? Is that the path you've chosen, Sergei? We're not going to allow you to continue in it!"

Vadim stopped abruptly, and sat down, flushed and heated, but with a sensation of relief: now he had said the right thing. He saw Palavin grow gloomier and gloomier as he listened, trying to avert his gaze, and at last letting his head droop and staring at the floor. But the rest of the listeners smiled encouragingly and joyfully at Vadim, while Spartak looked at him with a sort of wonder, nodding approvingly.

When Vadim had finished, Spartak turned eagerly to Palavin:

"Have you anything more to say?"

Raising his head, his eyes on the ceiling, Sergei answered with a wry smile:

"I don't think so...."

Professor Krylov expressed his wish to speak. He rose from the sofa and moved to a seat at the table next to Spartak.

"I call this a very interesting meeting," he began, after a pause in which he scanned the rows of excited young faces. There was a deep silence in the hall. "You have raised a most important question—the question of morality. Many have spoken with truth and feeling, the Komsomol way. It was a pleasure to listen to them. Others took the wrong attitude, spoke a lot of nonsense, and confused their hearers. Before expressing my opinion

on the matter before us—the moral character of Sergei Palavin—I should like to touch on a few general problems, to remind you of certain things. . . .”

Krylov put a packet of cigarettes on the table, shook one out of it, and rolled it in his short strong fingers in silence. After the noise which had prevailed all through the meeting, Krylov’s quiet voice sounded amazingly calm and convincing.

“Vladimir Ilyich Lenin used to say: ‘The basis of communist morality is the struggle for the consolidation and completion of communism.’ Those words were spoken in 1920. Almost thirty years have passed, and we have created a new society and new people. But not all traces of the old times have yet been obliterated; they linger on in the minds and consciousness of some people. There still are petty egoists among us, individualists, lovers of a good life at the expense of others, careerists and vulgar-ians. And to fight against them, against these remnants of egoism, self-interest, envy, philistine prejudice in ourselves is to fight for morality, for the consolidation and final achievement of communism. And the more exacting you are to yourselves, to each other now, while you are studying, the fuller and finer will your life as creative workers be in the future. You must bear that in mind. And now what shall I say of Palavin? He’s undoubtedly gifted, he gets top marks, he writes poetry, he’s active, energetic. There seems to be nothing wrong with him. But looking deeper, it appears that all is smooth on the surface only. Under the surface we find a very different Palavin—a Palavin who is in love with himself, morally unclean, and—as Belov rightly pointed out—a petty, commonplace egoist. It has taken us a long time to find it out. We are all to blame for that. Belov, by the way. . . .” Krylov turned a stern, unsmiling face on Vadim, but it seemed to Vadim that the professor’s pale eyes, set deep under the jutting brows, were smiling at

• him encouragingly. "Belov's speech was extremely interesting, and, I would say, courageous. I liked the way he spoke. And I like the meeting on the whole. This trouble about Palavin will teach us to take more interest in each other, it will make us analyze our own behaviour, our general outlook. We discussed today his unsocial behaviour in the Institute, his conduct towards a certain girl—bad, dishonest conduct. And a few hours before I happened to hear something else Palavin has done. The man who told me of it promised to come to the meeting; I asked him to. Alexander Denisovich," Krylov turned towards Levchuk, "see if Krezberg is here."

"Fyodor Andreyevich, who are you talking about?" Spartak asked, as Levchuk was leaving the room.

"Krezberg. He's a postgraduate at the Moscow University. We made friends at the front; he was platoon commander in my regiment. You'll hear him in a minute. . . ."

Presently Levchuk returned, followed by a tall, red-haired man in a leather sports jacket with a zip-fastener, carrying a bulky brown brief case. With a shy bow to all present, Krezberg followed Levchuk to the sofa, walking all the way on tiptoe for some reason.

"Victor Martynovich, come over here!" cried Krylov, offering him his place. "Sit where everyone can see you."

Krezberg obediently went and sat by the table, setting his brief case upright on the floor, as if it were a suitcase. He looked round, with a shy, uncertain smile. His eyes fell on Palavin, and he stopped smiling abruptly, and looked away quickly. Vadim noticed that Palavin too lowered his eyes and went red.

"Comrade Krezberg told me today, half an hour before the Komsomol Bureau assembled, about the way Palavin worked at that paper of his which made such an impression in our 'learned circles,'" said Krylov. "In order to have it all clear before us, I asked Krezberg to come to the

Bureau and repeat his story. Do any members of the Bureau object?"

"No, no! I suggest we hear out Comrade Krezberg!" Spartak eagerly answered. "Comrade Krezberg, proceed!"

Comrade Krezberg gave a little cough and began speaking in a smooth, quiet voice:

"I wasn't quite prepared for this sort of thing, comrades. But since I've started, I suppose I must go on. Some months ago my cousin introduced Sergei to me and asked me to help him with his work on a paper he was then writing—about the plays of Turgenev. I am just finishing a thesis on the same subject myself. I helped him with the choice of material, with bibliographical data, and gave him a few hints on composition and other things. We met a couple of times. I told him all about my own work. He asked me to let him see my thesis. I let him have a few chapters for one day, on condition that he would not put certain conclusions of mine in his paper. They were the result of two years of research work, and I didn't wish some facts and ideas—those, for instance, about the three characteristic features of Turgenev's dramaturgy, and a few biographical data—to be published before my thesis came out. I did ask you about that, didn't I, Sergei?" he said, turning abruptly to Palavin.

Palavin, who had been listening to Krezberg with a glum expression, silently nodded.

"I know I shouldn't have given my thesis, an unfinished one especially, to an outsider. One isn't supposed to do such things. But—Sergei asked, and my cousin Valya begged for him. . . . To be brief, I soon heard from Valya that Sergei's paper was a success, that it was read at your S.R.S., and approved of by the Chair. I was glad for Sergei's sake. I hadn't seen him since the meeting I mentioned. But yesterday my professor, Klyuchnikov, brought your students' journal to the University. 'Look,

a student of a Pedagogical Institute has gone you one better,' he said, 'a certain Palavin. Read his article, "Turgenev as a Playwright." ' I began reading it—I had no idea it was Sergei's, I didn't know his surname. It seemed some enterprising student really had managed to outdo me! I wouldn't say it was a case of plagiarizing. The article was written from quite a different angle, and it had many original ideas in it. But, you see, I found those very things, those little discoveries of mine, of which I had been so proud. Those very conclusions which I had begged Sergei not to mention in his work—there they were, woven into the rest of the text. Naturally I was upset, and so was my professor. I wanted to get hold of Sergei, and rang up Valya. But she had left for Khar'kov. So I decided to come to your Institute, where whom should I meet but Fyodor Andreyevich—he and I were friends at the front, ever since Stalingrad, though we had not seen each other for two years. I told him my story, and he asked me to come to your Bureau meeting. I do not consider Sergei's work plagiarism, mind you, his paper is an independent work on the whole. But Sergei broke his promise to me, he deceived me and placed me in a false position. I consider it unethical—I would say un-Komsomol conduct. I did not mean to make this business public, I had no idea I would have to speak at a meeting and all that. . . . I only wanted to see Sergei, and have a talk with him. But—this is how it all turned out, and instead of a few words I have been obliged to make a regular speech. And I think that's all, comrades. . . ."

Krezberg had finished, and Spartak asked Palavin if it was true. Palavin said it was.

"You used another man's work for your paper. Why did you do it?"

Palavin went pale, and muttered, averting his eyes: "I don't consider my paper a plagiarism."

"And what do you consider it to be?" Spartak asked. "An independent original work?"

After a long pause Palavin answered in a tired apathetic voice:

"I wanted to finish it as quickly as possible. . . ."

"Oh, yes," said Spartak. "You were in a hurry to get it into the journal. You were in a hurry to get the scholarship. And then your paper had to be 'something out-of-the-ordinary,' didn't it?"

. . . The Komsomol Bureau of the Third Year passed the following resolution: "For breaking the principles of communist morality, to give Sergei Palavin a severe reprimand and a warning."

Two days later the general Komsomol meeting was held. Again Spartak, Vadim, Marina Gravets, Lagodenko, Sirikh and other students from Palavin's group spoke. Girls from the theatrical circle told of their work with Palavin during the rehearsals of the skits. Nobody denied that Palavin was gifted, but most agreed that working with him had been unpleasant. He could not stand any criticism and considered his own decisions final.

"Somehow all our collective achievements were ascribed to Palavin alone," Valya Mauer said. "Is that just? Take those New Year skits—two episodes—the one in the library, and that about the wall newspaper—belong to Platonov, a second-year student. And a great part of the famous football match broadcast was written by Alexei Remeshkov. . . ."

With slow steps Palavin approached the tribune. This time he did not assume the role of martyr. He was sombre and brought out his words with difficulty. He admitted he had a disgusting character—he was a beastly egoist. All that was true, absolutely true. . . . But he would like to assure "all present" that they wouldn't have to put up

with his beastly disposition for long. Soon they would be able to breathe freely. It was absurd that such a lot of people should suffer from the presence of one person. He would have mercy on them. He would go away....

"Have you nothing to say to us, Sergei, but these false, artificial words?" asked Levchuk, who spoke next.

Palavin was sitting in the first row, all hunched up, his head in his hands. No, he had nothing more to say. After the meeting, which had approved the resolution of the Bureau by a majority vote, Vadim heard Lena Medovskaya say to someone in a strained, trembling voice:

"I don't understand.... Can't a person love one girl, and then meet another one and ... and ..." she went on helplessly, "stop loving the first one?"

She broke down and wept, running away with her handkerchief to her eyes. Earnest little Li Bon came up to Vadim. His eyes were unusually large and shining.

"Thank you!" he grasped Vadim's hand and shook it with all his might. "It's ... it's right! You mustn't do bad to woman, you must love woman! We are Communists—yes? We are new man, new—yes? The old man..." he shook his brown boyish fist with fury, "the old—away, away! Throw him out! That is right!"

Palavin did not come to the Institute the next day. And the day after he handed in an application to Miron Mikhailovich asking to be transferred to the Correspondence Course. He had made up his mind to leave Moscow, to teach in a village school.

Chapter 27

It was the end of March—that month of winds and thaws, and of the first warm, sunny, spring days.

In the yard of the house where Andrei Sirikh lived there still lay low snowdrifts covered with a hard crust; the river was still icebound, and the people of Troitskoye

could walk across it to the bus stop. But every day seemed to take some more snow with it. Stiffen itself as it would, making itself black and unseemly, masquerading now as a clot of dirt, now as a stone, try as it would to hide itself near fences and in ditches, the sun discovered it everywhere. It died, melting into rivulets, to return, like all things mortal, to the earth.

The woods smelt of rotting leaves and thaw water. Where the snow had left it, the earth, half-buried in the remains of last year's leaves and twigs, could so far only yield a wealth of heady odours.

Olga brought home the first snowdrops and talked of the return of the birds. In the garden, among the black boughs of the lime tree, the rooks, coming back from overseas, were making their nests, the finch was beginning to whistle. And from high above the field, midway between sky and earth, could be heard the joyous spring song of the lark. . . .

Moscow was washed by moisture-laden winds from the south. The city squares lay gleaming, and the last remains of the snow were being carted away. Spring was coming to Moscow. The streets were more crowded and noisy. Mimosa from the Caucasus was being sold at every street corner—it arrived in airplanes every morning. Little girls were skipping wherever they could find a sun-dried patch on the pavements, and it was the height of fashion among the boys to go about without caps.

This was no ordinary spring. As a matter of fact, for the last few years each spring had seemed more wonderful than the last.

Along Gorky Street and some others the planting of trees which had had to be stopped in the winter was being resumed. In various parts of the town tall new buildings—the first Soviet skyscrapers—were going up. One of them was a magnificent present for Moscow and

indeed for the whole of Soviet youth—the new building for the University on the Lenin Hills.

At seminars on current politics, students discussed the stirring news from China, where the troops of General Chu Teh were irresistibly advancing to south and west.

Vadim's life was tumultuous as a spring torrent, and like the torrent kept overflowing its boundaries—the seventeen hours allotted each day. He was finishing his paper. He was appointed editor of the third-year wall newspaper instead of Max Vilkin, who had been promoted to the Editorial Board of the wall newspaper for the whole department. He went on with the literary circle at the plant. And all through March, like the rest of the students of his year, he had to give practice lessons at school.

He had not seen Palavin since the meeting. It was said that for a long time Sizov had refused to transfer Palavin to the Correspondence Course, but that in the end Palavin had prevailed. But he had not gone away—he was seen about town.

Lena Medovskaya did not speak to Vadim. She was very much changed—taciturn and reserved. She seemed absorbed in her studies.

One day she brought Vadim a book, neatly wrapped up in newspaper, and said:

"Here's your Balzac. Sergei returns it to you."

"Have you seen him recently?"

"We meet pretty often."

"What's he doing?"

"Working," she answered defiantly and turned to go. Vadim held her back by her elbow.

"Just a minute. . . . Is he very cross with me?"

"I don't know. We never talk about you," Lena answered, pulling her arm out of Vadim's grasp.

Soon after, there was a meeting of the Editorial Board. Lena, who was still responsible for the "Art

and Culture" section, begged to be released from her duties. Vadim made no difficulties—she had never really been of much use to the paper. But Spartak was indignant:

"Does that mean you don't want to do any social work? You're a Komsomol member still, aren't you? If so, you must take part in the work."

"I'll do clubwork," Lena said, "or work in the school. I'd like to work in the school—give me an assignment."

Spartak told her to get in touch with Valya Mauer, who was in charge of the students' social activities at the school. "She simply doesn't want to work with me," Vadim told himself.

On the first of April the student delegation was to leave for Leningrad. Vadim went to the station to see Andrei off.

It was a fresh evening, and very calm. The buildings were submerged in the deep blue twilight, and the sky above them was clean, the blue washed out almost to greenness, getting gradually darker towards the top. The first stars were beginning to shimmer in the depths of it, promising a warm day for the morrow.

On the way to the station Vadim was thinking with a thrill of meeting Olga there. But she was nowhere to be seen on the platform, and Andrei was standing in a group of strangers, members of the delegation like himself. He was wearing a shortish leather coat—his father's—and high boots.

"Why have you come so late, Vadim, old man?" He embraced Vadim and shook his head sadly. "We've drunk up all the beer. Pyotr and Raya were here, and Maxim and Nina—they've just gone. Our train will start in ten minutes."

Andrei sighed and added, lowering his voice:

"Phooh—I feel nervous somehow...."

"Why should you?"

"Well, I do.... One would like to appear to advantage, you know—there are the students from other Moscow institutes, as well as the Leningrad people. And I have lost confidence all of a sudden. I start wondering whether I've got things right.... The last three nights I sat up rereading *Klim Samgin*."

"Everything will be all right, Andrei," Vadim said with a smile. "But of course you know that yourself."

"I wonder..." Andrei sighed, pushed his glasses up on his forehead, and rubbed his eyes. "There'll be all sorts of discussions there, debates. And you know how bad I am at talking. I'm sure to make a mess of the whole thing.... By the way, why do you think Gorky chose a type like Klim Samgin for the central figure of his epic?"

Vadim said something in answer, and they fell to arguing. They had moved away from the group of the other delegates and were walking along the platform towards the engine. In the midst of the conversation Vadim asked abruptly:

"Why isn't Olga here?"

"Olga?" Andrei echoed absently. "Oh, she's here somewhere or other. She's gone to get me a cake of soap; I forgot to put it in when packing. She's taking a long time over it, though...." Andrei glanced at his watch, and went on: "And do you think it was by mere chance that Gorky chose to write his novel without a clearly defined plot? It's not even a novel, just a narrative...."

Vadim, who had been arguing languidly till now, suddenly caught fire:

"Gorky chose nothing! Are there clearly defined plots in life? He took life as it was, inventing nothing, adding nothing...."

"Andrei!"

It was Olga. She was running towards them along the platform, waving her hands.

"Hullo, Vadim!" she said, with a joyful glance at him.

"Where have you been all this time?" said Andrei sternly.

"I had to go right out into the square! You absent-minded traveller, I hope you'll remember to wash every day."

"Now, then, stop trying to be funny. . . . Give it here." Frowning, Andrei put the soap into his coat pocket. "You'd better go home at once, Olga, or you'll be late for the twelve-o'clock bus."

"Home?" echoed Olga, her smile suddenly vanishing. "I wanted to stay till the train. . . ."

"Never mind what you wanted! The next bus leaves at a quarter to one, and I won't have you walking alone on the road at night. Now then, off with you!"

Olga maintained a sulky silence.

"I will stay," she said quietly. Her face suddenly lit up. "I can spend the night at Aunt Natasha's! I was thinking of looking in on her anyhow. I haven't seen her for six months."

Shrugging his shoulders, Andrei muttered:

"You used to say you would never stay over at Aunt Natasha's because she kept you from sleeping with her prattle. Whence this sudden wave of family feeling?"

"Let's go nearer to your carriage, the train will start in a minute!" cried Vadim, pulling Andrei by the arm.

Just before the train started, Andrei remembered something important he had been meaning to tell Vadim.

"I went to see Kuznetsov the other day. He wants to organize a discussion on the theme 'The Soviet Young Man.' Remember we talked about it? He wants our students to take part in it. It ought to be very interesting."

"Yes, I remember," Vadim said. "I think it was Pavlov's idea."

"It was. D'you know what he's doing now?"

• "No, I don't. He wanted to go away..."

"He's an idiot!" said Andrei brusquely. "That's cowardice! I suppose he thinks that if he goes to the taiga, a half-baked teacher, it'll be an act of self-sacrifice."

Andrei uttered these last words from the steps of the carriage. The train had begun to move, quietly, as if it wanted to slip out unobserved. Those who had come to see their friends off, walked beside the train in a crowd, looking into carriage windows, stumbling over one another and shouting out farewell messages:

"Mind your throat, Zhenya!"

"Ligovka Street, five! Five!"

"Love to Yan!"

"Don't forget the cyclamen!"

This last injunction was addressed to Andrei. After the train had gone, the platform rapidly cleared. Vadim asked Olga what a cyclamen was.

"It's an Alpine violet, very beautiful. I have a girl friend in Leningrad, and she's got one. I asked Andrei to bring me some seeds. But he's sure to forget," said Olga with an expressive wave of her hand.

They went out into the square in front of the station. Even at that late hour it was full of bustle and light. The night stalls, ice cream and cigarette vendors, and flower girls, were all busily trading. Light-grey taxis with their check pattern on the sides stood in a line along the pavements. They kept driving off every minute and new ones arrived, moving slowly, as if feeling their way among the crowd of pedestrians.

Olga, generally so talkative and high-spirited, was very quiet. She held herself somewhat aloof. "After all, she's just a little girl," thought Vadim, "probably afraid I'll take her arm."

"Where does your Aunt Natasha live?" he asked.

"Right in town. I'll take the Metro to Okhotny."

"We might walk a little way."

"Walk? All right, let's. . . . Only it's so slippery here. May I take your arm?"

They walked arm in arm. Olga brightened up and began talking about her school and the coming exams. She was graduating this spring. She would like to work at some experimental forest station, like the one she had worked at during practice. Wouldn't she mind leaving Moscow? Of course, it would be rather sad. . . . Andrei would be graduating soon, and then he'd go away, and their father would be left all alone.

"But after all it's not forever, is it?" Olga said eagerly. "I'm sure to come back to Moscow, and then I'll have my dissertation ready, I'll have achieved something. Do you ever dream of anything special?"

"I do," Vadim answered, after a slight pause.

"What is it?"

"I'd like to meet you when you come back to Moscow, having achieved something."

"Oh, now you're joking," said Olga, laughing. "But seriously?"

"I'm not joking."

"And what if I never come back?"

"Then. . . . Well, then I'll come to you. I suppose there'll be children where you work, and they'll have to be taught. . . ."

"Children—in the forest?" said Olga quietly. "It'll be in the forest. . . ."

Olga broke off, averting her face and looking at the cars tearing down the street. Vadim said slowly, as if he were trying to prove something:

"Even in the forest people have children. You will have children too. And they'll have to be taught. So. . . ."

"My children?" Olga asked in amazement and suddenly burst out laughing so loud that passers-by turned to look at her. "Do you expect me to have such a lot of children that a special school will have to be opened for

them? Oh, Vadim. . . . Listen!" she said, turning serious. "I'd like you to come and see me. Not one day a hundred years hence when I have a dozen children. I'll be very lonely this week. . . . You know what—bring your work on Pushkin and Lermontov, and read it to me. Andrei told me it was very interesting. Have you finished it?"

"Not quite."

"Well, never mind, bring what there is of it. Don't think I'm such an ignoramus about literature. Andrei always consults me."

"Will you miss Andrei?" Vadim asked.

"Yes. He and I are great friends, really. Do come, Vadim! Father is always asking why you never come to us any more. Otherwise . . ." Olga hesitated and added, in a small voice: "we shall only meet when Andrei comes back, at the station."

"He'll be back in ten days or so," said Vadim.

"Isn't that a long time?"

"Is it?"

"Of course it is. I . . ." she turned her face on him suddenly, and he could see the reflections of the city lights dancing in her eyes. "I would like you to join me in the forest. One day . . . when I have so many children a special school has to be built for them."

They were standing at the bus stop, and a gently-rocking trolley bus was already approaching, empty, diaphanous, a little melancholy. They got into it, waking the dozing conductor, and did not say a word to each other all the way. But as soon as they got off, Vadim said, pressing Olga's hand:

"Did you mean it?"

"I was only joking," she answered. "It's the first of April. Come on—there's Aunt Natasha's house!"

And she ran along the pavement, her hand still in Vadim's, dragging him after her. They said good-bye to

each other in the big, empty vestibule. The lift looked fast asleep.

"Your joke won't hold," said Vadim, looking at the clock. "It's ten to one—it's the second of April already."

"Is it really?" cried Olga in a frightened voice. "I had no idea it was so late. I must run."

"No, you mustn't," said Vadim, taking her other hand. "Do you admit your joke won't hold?"

"I suppose so," said Olga with a sigh.

"So you did mean it?"

"I did," she said almost inaudibly. "Hurry up, Vadim, you'll be late for the Metro."

"No, no... I..." a wave of irrepressible tenderness swept over him and left him trembling. He waved his hand. "I won't be late. I'll come and see you."

"Good-bye, Vadim! Run—quick!"

He went slowly along the street—he was late for the Metro anyhow. The starlit sky hung over the town, emitting a moist spring fragrance. The town had not yet gone to sleep: cars whizzed by, making neat loops round the white-gloved militiamen at street corners. People were sauntering about the streets, or sitting on the damp benches in the square opposite the theatre. They were all happy, with the happiness of the warm April night, each of them had somebody to love and was loved by somebody, each had something to look forward to—spring, the May celebrations, summer holidays with the hot sun and cool river—so many good things ahead!

Practice-teaching was coming to an end. During the six weeks it lasted each student had to give four lessons—two in Russian Grammar, and two in Literature, besides attending the lessons given by other students, and discussing them afterwards with the specialist in methods. The

entire third-year class was broken up into small groups and distributed among Moscow schools.

On the whole the schoolwork had passed satisfactorily, but for an unfortunate little episode with Lagodenko: coming across two boys fighting on the stairs during recess, Lagodenko, instead of stopping them, gave them a lesson in boxing. The Principal came upon the young pedagogue just when, in his capacity of trainer, he was shouting vainly to the boxers to stand back and rushing to pull them apart. The whole group got a severe reprimand that day.

Vadim was one of the first to give his four lessons. The specialist on methods gave him the highest mark, but Vadim was not quite pleased with himself. Sitting in at the lessons given by his comrades, he kept going over his own in his mind, each time finding fresh mistakes and omissions in them. Vadim liked the way Lagodenko gave his lessons. His manner was grave, but forceful and enthusiastic, and he roused his pupils to ecstasy by the nautical examples with which he illustrated the driest grammatical rules. Andrei was calm and confident in class. Vadim thought Nina Fokina's manner too severe. The only thing she had mastered to perfection was the austere "teacher's" tone, and she seemed to think of nothing but how to maintain an expression of strict impartiality. In reality she was so nervous that as soon as she called a pupil to the board she forgot what she had intended to ask him. "She'll never make a teacher," Vadim told himself. "She'll be a research worker, or a specialist on methods."

There were only two lessons on the last day of practice-teaching and of these, one was to be given by Lena Medovskaya.

In the small room downstairs set aside for the use of the students it was as noisy and crowded as usual; everyone was occupied; some hastily reading up for a lesson

and looking through each other's notes, others simply chatting. The methods teacher, a heavy grey man in steel-rimmed spectacles, taciturn but good-natured, was going over Lena Medovskaya's notes for the coming lesson. Some girls seated at the window were actually singing in low voices.

"You shouldn't be singing, comrades," he said placidly, without looking up. "You're supposed to be working, you know."

"It's the spring, Alexei Evgrafovich," the girls answered him, laughing.

"Besides, practice-teaching is over at last!"

"Don't you try and run away from Medovskaya's lesson. You must all attend."

"So you did mean it?"

Lena was giving a lesson in Russian Grammar to the fifth grade. This was the first time Vadim had attended a lesson in the fifth grade, his own had been in the sixth and eighth. He was amused to see the boys crowd round Lena during recess, pestering her with questions and calling her Elena Konstantinovna; they dragged her towards their wall newspaper, and Lena laughed with them at the cartoons. She was obviously a great favourite. Vadim knew that for the last fortnight Lena had spent all her evenings at the school—she had got up a song circle and induced a professional choir leader of her acquaintance to train it, herself working with the dramatic circle, which was rehearsing a play for May Day.

As Lena entered the classroom and stopped by the teacher's desk, Vadim noticed that she was very carefully dressed, in a smart, light summer frock. "Lena's true to herself—never misses an occasion for getting a new dress," he thought, smiling. But observing the hushed silence in the classroom, and the way the boys never took their eyes off her, Vadim realized that they thoroughly

appreciated her good looks, her cheerful smile and her smart dress.

She was perfectly at ease at the lesson, knew the last names of all her pupils, and the first names of many of them. In the lesson itself she displayed a certain skill, introducing fresh material lucidly, so that she even had fifteen minutes left for drilling—something very few had been able to achieve. Observing her from his place at the back of the room, and listening to her calm, resonant voice, it flashed through Vadim's mind that she might make a good teacher. And then he thought that Lena's beauty and charm—those very things he had considered useless gifts—might acquire a new and wonderful significance in her work as a teacher.

Vadim remained in the room after the lesson to have a look at the wall newspaper. It was very well done and was illustrated with water colours and cartoons by an ingenious hand.

"Who's the brilliant artist?" Vadim asked the boys.

"Oh, that's Sasha!"

"Come here, Sasha!"

"Where is he?"

Some boys rushed off to find Sasha, and in another minute they dragged in a little boy in a green jacket and knee pants. He was scarlet with embarrassment and tried to hang back.

"Are you the artist?" Vadim asked, and all at once he recognized the boy. "Why, it's Sasha Palavin!"

"He's so shy, he ought to go to a girls' school!" someone cried out hilariously.

"Hullo!" said Sasha quietly.

"Fancy meeting you!" Vadim cried in amazement.

"How is it I didn't see you at the lesson?"

"I was sitting at the back..."

"Did you see me?"

Sasha nodded.

"I like your drawings. Come. . . ." Vadim took Sasha by the elbow. "I want to talk to you."

They left the hall and came out on the empty landing.

"Fancy it being you!" Vadim repeated, smiling. "Tell me about Sergei—what's he doing?"

"Sergei?" asked Sasha, raising his eyes doubtfully to Vadim's. "He writes and he writes. . . and he keeps smoking."

"Smoking?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Does he smoke a lot?"

"Yes, an awful lot." After a short pause, Sasha added: "He's gone back to cigarettes, doesn't smoke a pipe any more."

"I see. What else does he do?"

"What else? Well, he reads, and helps me with my arithmetic. Then he lies on the sofa, doing nothing."

"Doesn't he go anywhere?"

"I don't know. He wants to go away for good."

"Does he?"

"Yes. But mother and I don't want him to. . . ."

"Of course not. Listen, Sasha," Vadim put his hand on Sasha's shoulder and asked him, his voice earnest and confiding: "What if I come to see you? What do you think—would it be all right?"

Sasha, suddenly embarrassed, turned his eyes away.

"I'm not quite sure. . . ."

"Why aren't you?"

"Well. . . today, for instance, Mother said you should never enter our house again. And Sergei shouted at her, and they had a quarrel. And I went to school. . . ."

Sasha seemed to want to say something more, but the bell summoned him to lessons.

"Just a minute! So Irina Victorovna is angry with me?"

"She's very high strung," said Sasha gravely, after a moment's pause. "She often shouts at me, too, and then she forgets all about it. Sergei says you've got to put up with her, like you have to put up with the next-door radio. Good-bye!"

And Sasha tiptoed rapidly across the hall.

As they were walking away from the school, Lena came up to Vadim.

"I'd like to have a talk with you," she said, looking straight into his eyes—a thing she had not done for a long time.

"Come on, then."

"I must... It's about Sergei."

Vadim nodded, and, letting the others pass, they turned into the square and sat down on a bench.

"You see, Vadim, I want to say..." she began in a low, faltering voice, crumpling one of her gloves in her hand. "Sergei's having a hard time, he's in a bad way... He's all alone—you do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Vadim nodded.

"And so... At first he even quarrelled with me. He didn't want to see me, he said I must despise him now, and he'd go away, and we'd never meet, and all that nonsense... But I don't think he ought to go away; he must stay in Moscow until he graduates. He's not the sort to study at a Correspondence Course, is he? You know he isn't! He argues with me, and it's hard to explain things to him! I don't know... If you would... I sometimes think you could make him see. Because you're... You're such a... because you're like that."

"Like that..." Vadim repeated and smiled. He remembered those very words said to him by Lena in quite different circumstances.

"He's made up his mind to go away. If you could only see him, Vadim!... He's changed terribly. He never goes

out, and smokes all day, and he's ever so pale and thin. And he's as grumpy as a bear with a sore head."

Lena fell silent, shaking her head sadly. It was the first time in his life that Vadim had heard her talk so sincerely and ruefully, and at the same time so humanly of her feelings.

"And that's why I wanted to talk to you. Something must be done. You can't cast a person off like that, and leave him to his fate.... We must make him come back to us."

After a moment's hesitation Vadim said with conviction:

"He'll come back."

"I wish he'd hurry up! But, Vadim, couldn't you... couldn't you talk to him? Go and see him? Or meet him somewhere—as if you had run across him by chance, you know?"

"No, Lena, I don't think I ought to do that just now."

"You think not? You think it would be better not to?" Lena asked doubtfully. "Perhaps you're right, I don't know...."

She got up from the bench, and, taking a little mirror out of her handbag, began tucking a light wisp of hair under her hat.

"Perhaps you're right," she repeated with a sigh. "I suppose there's a lot I don't understand. I'm a giddy creature, aren't I, Vadim?"

"There's something in that," said Vadim, laughing.

Chapter 28

Sergei Palavin got up from his desk. He had finished the last sentence of his paper on the esthetics of Chernyshevsky. He had spent over a month on this work. The bulky notebook lay on the table, open at the last page. A few lines at the bottom curved upwards, and overflowed

to the blue cover. After a moment's thought, Sergei sat down once more, and wrote "THE END" in printed letters. Then he numbered the pages carefully—there were forty-five. Under the words "the end" he put his signature, and the date—the 12th of April.

At last the work of so many days was completed. Sergei balanced the book on the palm of his hand as if weighing it, and suddenly flung it behind the wardrobe. It slid down heavily between the wardrobe and the wall. It was a large notebook, and seemed to have swollen with writing.

Now that he had finished this work which had taken up so much of his thoughts and energies, and had been his occupation and interest from day to day, he realized he had no more use for it. Nobody wanted it. Who was there for him to show it to? Who would read it, appreciate it? Nobody!

It was three o'clock. The sunny April day was bursting in through the open window. The room was flooded with sunshine and fragrant with spring. The warm breeze got entangled in the folds of the curtains, alternately tossing them aside, and bellying them as if they were sails. It brought into the room the odours of springtime in town—a blend of the smells rising from the roofs, damp plaster, earth and petrol. Outside, the air rang with the sound of voices, laughter, automobile horns, and a whole scale of watery notes—dripping, gurgling and splashing from caves. From below came the dull thud of mattresses being beaten. Windows were being cleaned somewhere; a frightened voice called out: "Sonya, don't lean out of the window like that!" and another answered cheerfully: "It's not a bit high!"

It was three o'clock. His mother was at the office; Sasha would be back from school soon, flinging his satchel on to the trunk in the hall, and snatching up a bit of bread and butter to munch as he rushed out into the

yard, where his friends would be waiting for him with a damp football. And at the Institute. . . . They must have finished practice-teaching, and have gone back to lectures. The last—the sixth—lecture was over ten minutes ago. Now a cheerful bustle was going on in the cloak-room. Lipatych was grumbling at them for not “waiting their turn,” the students were pouring into the yard in a merry crowd, chatting and laughing . . . Life goes on as usual, made more vivid and joyous by the spring. And no one finds it strange that Sergei Palavin is not among them. . . .

Sergei rose from the sofa and ransacked his desk and his pockets for cigarettes. There were only tobacco crumbs to be found. And he had no money. Would he have to do without smoking till the evening, and then beg his mother for money to buy the cheapest brand? He closed the window. At his desk again, he started listlessly drawing wide-brimmed hats on the back of a book. Hats and boots were the only things he could draw.

He simply must get away! Tonight he'd have a final talk with his mother, ask her for money, and go. If she refused to let him have the money he could sell all his books, the whole library which he had collected with such loving care. . . . Of course his mother would not give him the money. She would start weeping and complaining that he never considered her feelings for a moment. And where was he to go? His uncle, whom she had told all about him, harped on the same string every night: “You're a coward, you're afraid of going back. You're ashamed to admit your fault.” As if it were so simple! “What's so hard about it? As an honest man you must see how things stand.” It was easy enough to preach and reason. Everything was simple to them. How could they understand his feelings?

Palavin opened the window. How stuffy it was in the room! He touched the radiators and withdrew his hand

• In disgust—they were warm. Heating when it's as hot as in summer—the idiots!

The room was filled again with the strident voices of spring. The window swung backwards and forwards in the wind and its reflection danced madly over the floor.

With quick steps Palavin left his room for the cool darkness of the hall. He went up to the telephone and took up the receiver—should he ring up Lena? She would not be home yet. What about Spartak? Or Fyodor Kaplin? Or Vadim? Was there no one he could talk to? Not one human being? He began feverishly turning over the leaves of his notebook. Valya Gruzina. . . . Kuznetsov, Krylov, Kaplin, Kozelsky. . . . What about Kozelsky? . . . He would try Kozelsky. Probably he knew nothing about him.

Palavin dialled the number, feeling sure he would not find him at home. A young bass drawled out:

"Hullo!"

"May I speak to Boris Matveyevich?"

"Just a minute . . . Boris!"

He could hear muffled voices coming from somewhere in the spacious flat, which sounded as if it were full of people. Someone was playing scales on the piano, and even this spoke of spring, for the sound was like water trickling on to the window sill.

"Hullo!"

"Good afternoon, Boris Matveyevich! It's Palavin."

"Who? Oh, Sergei—how are you?" Kozelsky answered eagerly. "You haven't forgotten me?"

"I have not, Boris Matveyevich!"

"Thanks, Sergei! How are you getting on? I've heard of your success. How's the Institute? What's the news?"

He talked so fast that Palavin could not get a word in edgewise. "He hasn't heard anything about me!" he thought.

"Nothing special, Boris Matveyevich. How are you getting on? Hard at work?"

"Oh, yes! Of course I am! Yes..." his voice sounded exaggeratedly cheerful. "I'm working at home for the time being, writing a little, reading. My prospects are still somewhat vague, but I hope for the best. I've been through a period of revision of values, so to speak; of course I felt it rather keenly, you know, but time, they say, is the best physician—time and work, I would add. You know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes!" Palavin answered. The conversation had turned out to be a tedious one, and he was angry with himself for having rung up. Kozelsky began asking him in detail all about institute life, about the professors, students and the Research Society. Palavin tried to tell him as much as he could. His news was three weeks old, but Kozelsky could not know this, and drank it in eagerly. The conversation petered out.

Palavin hung up the receiver and turned away in vexation. He now realized that he had secretly hoped Kozelsky knew about his situation, and would console him, give him hope, advise him what to do. But of course that was nonsense. Kozelsky was the last person he could expect help from.

Palavin was longing for a smoke. Indeed, he felt as if all his sufferings came from the fact that he had no cigarettes.

When he did at last go out, it was with a huge volume of Flaubert under his arm. It seemed to weigh at least a ton. Only last year he had been hunting everywhere for this book, visiting all the bookshops, talking to the book-sellers, offering them other books in exchange. . . . He had often met people selling books in those shops, and had always felt pity mingled with shame for them. He used to think that they looked apologetic, as if they were hiding from someone.

It was not so easy to sell a book, he discovered. One shop was shut, another had no money just then, in a

third shop the assessor was ill. A secondhand bookseller, who knew Palavin, was amazed:

"Selling Flaubert? I thought you were collecting him!"

"I was, but I've been promised the complete works. . . ."

"Have you?" the man's interest was roused. "Through a shop, or privately?"

"Through a friend."

"But why are you looking so ill?" the man went on. "Are you unwell?"

"Only the usual spring flu," muttered Palavin.

At last Palavin sold his Flaubert. He left the shop, the money crumpled up in his tightly clenched fist. He bought himself a packet of cigarettes at once. A month ago he would have shuddered at the very thought of selling his book. Now the act itself meant nothing to him.

Getting into a bus, he asked the conductor for a ticket to Kirov Gate. The conductor told him he was going in the wrong direction.

"And where does this bus go?"

"To Kaluzhskaya, citizen. Get out, before the door shuts."

Palavin hesitated for a second, and then seated himself with sudden resolution.

"Give me a ticket to Kaluzhskaya. . . ."

The bus crossed Kamenny Bridge. People were crowding at the iron railings. The passengers looked out of the windows, all talking together in incoherent snatches:

"They should have done it long ago."

"What are they dynamiting?"

"The ice."

"What for?"

"So's the river won't flood."

"Did they just begin today?"

Palavin looked out of the window, unconcerned.

He got off at the familiar stop. The wide expanse of Kaluzhskaya was as damp and clean as if someone had just washed it with a gigantic mop. The sun was reflected in the asphalt surface and in the windows of the tall new buildings. Palavin entered the familiar yard with a feeling that he had never been there before.

He just missed the lift, and there was a heavy metal rumbling as it was going up. Too impatient to wait for its return, he began walking up two steps at a time.

Vadim, Spartak, Lagodénko and Nina Fokina were sitting in Vadim's room. The windows were wide open. Vadim had been reading his paper to them (he had finished it the day before) and they had been discussing it over an hour.

All four were talking so loudly and excitedly, that they did not hear the bell and a neighbour had to answer the door. Neither did any one of them hear the soft knock at the door, and they only noticed Palavin when he was in the room.

Palavin entered, slightly stooping, a cigarette between his teeth, and cast uncertain glances around him. He had not expected to find so many familiar faces here.

Vadim was the first to see him; he got up and silently shook him by the hand. Spartak and Nina shook hands with him in silence, too, but Lagodenko said:

"Greetings!"

He looked at Palavin with frank wonder and incredulity, and when the latter had taken a seat by the table, said:

"You look like a first-class passenger after a storm, mate! What's the matter?"

"Springtime flu," said Palavin. "Are you busy, Vadim?"

"Not any more. We've been discussing my paper."

"Well?"

"It's very interesting," Nina said. "A pity you didn't come earlier, you would have heard it then."

"It would have done me good, eh?" said Palavin with a wry smile.

"What are you doing? Where are you studying?" asked Spartak, pretending not to have heard Sergei's last remark.

"At home so far. . . . I'd like to have a talk with you, Vadim."

Vadim nodded

"You'll have your talk, don't worry," said Lagodenko, rising to his feet; coming up to Palavin he laid his hand on his shoulder. "Listen to me, Sergei! Have you really made up your mind to go away? It's stupid and it's wrong. You've got to stay in the Institute, and not go anywhere. And I don't mean the Correspondence Course, either! There was a time when I thought of running away myself. But I put the brake on just in time. And I advise you to give up the idea. You'll feel better—I mean, it'll be better for you that way. That's all!"

"No, it isn't!" Spartak retorted with force. "Sergei, why did you get transferred to the Correspondence Course, and decide to leave? Tell us honestly: was it because you didn't agree with us? Do you consider yourself a martyr? Answer me."

Palavin was looking sulkily out of the window. He remained silent for a long time, chewing at his long-dead cigarette. The ash fell on to his trousers, and he brushed it away mechanically.

"Why don't you say something?" Spartak asked impatiently.

"I was transferred to the Correspondence Course by order. . . ."

"Cut it out! Stop talking nonsense, and listen! If you wish to come back, you'll be accepted. If any difficulties arise... well, we'll try and help you. If you come back like an honest man, frankly..."

"You think it's easy? After all that..."

"Of course it's not easy!" cried Spartak. "Nothing will be easy for you now. The simplest way out would be to go away. To run away and play the martyr..."

"Yes!" laughed Lagodenko. "Lermontov* in exile!..."

"Very witty..." muttered Palavin, wincing.

"Listen, we understand everything," said Spartak calmly. "No, it's not easy to come back. Especially since you left us on a silly whim of your own, a whim which was simply a pose. Yes, a pose—I'm convinced it was that. Surely you realize that yourself, but—it is hard to overcome one's own nature—it hurts, and one's pride suffers. But you've got to come back. You were one of us when you made your mistakes, and it is as one of us that you must rectify them. I for one believe you will yet become a true Komsomol member."

"So do I!" agreed Lagodenko. "Well, we're off to look at the ice moving. They say today's the first day."

"No, it started last night," said Nina. "What crowds there were, watching it by the hour! Mere idle curiosity, if you ask me."

"A lot you understand! Come on, quick!" and Lagodenko took Nina round the waist and carried her to the door. "Looking at the ice moving is as good as going to the Conservatory. A regular symphony! Come on, let them fight it out between themselves. Do you want seconds?"

"We'll manage by ourselves," said Vadim.

* M. Y. Lermontov (1814-1841)—Russian poet who gave expression to the most advanced ideas of his time. The tsarist government twice exiled him to the Caucasus, where he died during his second term of exile.—*Tr.*

The other three went away. In a few minutes Vadim, looking out of the window, saw them standing at the bus stop. Lagodenko caught sight of him and started making mysterious signals to him—shaking his fist in the air and stamping alternately as if he were driving in nails with an invisible hammer. Vadim nodded back, although he understood nothing of his signals.

Palavin was pacing up and down the room. He was smoking again, letting the ash drop on to the floor.

"There's an ash tray on the table," said Vadim.

"Sorry. . . ." Stopping by the table, Palavin put his cigarette out. "Well. . . First of all I don't know how you feel about me."

"And I don't know how you feel about *me*."

"I can explain. My feelings towards you were . . . well, bad. At first You were the first stone to roll down the hill, and it started others, until a whole avalanche descended upon me. . . . That's what I thought about you, Vadim. . . ."

"Very picturesque."

"It may seem so. To an outsider."

Palavin fell silent, knitting his brows and staring fixedly at his feet. Then he slowly raised his eyes, but meeting Vadim's gaze, lowered them again, frowning still more.

"Well, and now?" said Vadim.

"I was stupefied at first, I couldn't make any sense of it. . . . It took me several days to understand what had happened," Palavin muttered angrily, without raising his eyes. "I'm not going to beat my breast, go over my errors, and all that. . . . Empty words. Deeds must be answered with deeds. That's elementary. . . . All I want to say is that I am now a different person. Oh, not for you! For my own self. . . ."

"Again for yourself?" smiled Vadim.

"I mean, at first. . . ."

"I see. Go on!"

"Well. . . . After thinking over everything for the last three weeks, I realized that while I have been driven hard . . . yes, very hard . . . I deserved it. . . . In a word, I have come to you for advice—what am I to do?"

He was looking straight into Vadim's eyes now. His pale face, almost unrecognizably bony and sharp, went pink round the eyes.

"What are you to do?" Vadim echoed. "First of all you did right to come. To tell you the truth, I knew you would. I was sure of it. This is your first step in the right direction. Because you know what we all—Spartak and all of us—will advise you to do. We can advise only one thing."

Palavin nodded, and began talking rapidly and incoherently as if suddenly relieved:

"I couldn't stand it any longer! Yes, I've come, because you have no idea what it's like to be left to oneself. Oh, yes, I knew I ought not to go away, that it would be running away like a coward—I knew it, I knew it . . . But the thought of going back was still harder. Even just to go and see you . . . After all, Vadim, I may be an egoist, but I'm a social being, I can't live without people round me, without the collective. All the last few weeks . . . well, I worked at my paper on Chernyshevsky. I worked on it day and night, to distract myself. . . . But what for? What then? What was I to do with it—put it under my pillow? Who was I to read it to? . . . And it wasn't only the paper! That was a trifle, after all. . . . The thing is I had got used to the Institute, to everyone, to our way of living, all these things were dear to me. . . . And there I was, torn away from it all, alone on an island, like after a shipwreck . . . with no one left but Lena. Oh, Vadim, I do love her, I love her truly . . . it started in fun, but now it's serious, Vadim. . . . She made things easier for me. Or did she make them harder. . . . I don't know. . . ."

Palavin raised his shoulders, then, dropping them suddenly, fell silent. He seemed embarrassed by the flood of his own words.

"All right, then," said Vadim, with a grave look at him. "Shall we go and think out-of-doors?"

"Let's! It's spring out there..."

They went out into Kaluzhskaya Street, gilded by the slanting orange rays of the sun. Miniature waterfalls were cascading from the eaves, and people rushed past, with bent heads, holding their hats on, and leaping skittishly across the puddles.

Vadim and Sergei Palavin parted late in the evening on the big, noisy square. They were both tired out with talking and the hours spent on their feet.

"Do you remember, Sergei, how we met for the first time after the war on this very square?"

"Yes. But it was over there, next to the theatre."

"Yes, and it was in the daytime."

They both fell silent for a few minutes, looking at the lights in the square.

"I remember you telling me to be sure not to fall in love. You said it was a hindrance. One must make one's way by oneself. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time..."

"To what?"

"To making my way. But I've just been rereading Balzac's *Père Goriot*, and I came across the same thing—Rastignac's motto: Make your way at all costs! And in the end he did..." Vadim glanced sideways at Palavin and laughed. "Oh, well, it's all quite clear really. No sense in endless talking."

"You're right, of course," muttered Palavin, nodding. He seemed to feel chilly in his light overcoat and stood there, his head drawn in, his coat collar turned up. "I

only want to say, Vadim, that I've never been a careerist at heart—not at all. The paper on Turgenev just came out like that, I didn't mean to plagiarize. You know how it is—you get so used to somebody else's ideas, that in time you quite forget they're not your own. I expect that's how it was with me. And then, you know, I did so want to be the first in everything, and now it's all so hard for me, Vadim. . . .”

“It'll be harder yet!” said Vadim, quietly but firmly “You'll have to start all over again. You'll have to win back friendship and respect and your place at the top that you're so used to. It's the only way, I'm sure.”

“Three years ago,” said Sergei after a pause, “we met here. We had quite got out of touch with one another, we were almost strangers. . . . And now it seems to me that not three, but thirty years have passed. And we're standing here now, again out of contact, again almost strangers. It's as if we'd only just met.”

“Yes, it's been a long time,” agreed Vadim. “Perhaps we'll get back into contact. We still have another year and a half to go.”

“We'll see,” said Palavin briefly, stretching out his hand. “Well, good-bye!”

And he turned into the brightly-lit entrance to the Metro.

Chapter 29

Towards the end of April the weather turned unusually warm. The sun was as hot as in summer, and the watering carts had all they could do to keep the asphalt cooled. All Moscow donned summer clothes. The radio weather reports attributed the heat wave to “the movement of a mass of warm air from southern to northern latitudes,” and boasted of how many years it had been since Moscow had known such heat in April. The parks and squares turned green overnight.

A students' sports festival was scheduled to be held in one of the city parks on the last Sunday in April, with boxing matches in the afternoon and volleyball games in the evening. The Pedagogical Institute (P. I.) team was to meet the team from the Chemical Institute (C. I.). The winners of this match would emerge as the holders of the interinstitute championship.

Vadim arrived at the park in time for the boxing matches. Lagodenko was one of the Institute's champions, and Vadim had promised to cheer for him.

When Vadim reached the open-air ring, the space around it was crowded. Fans had come from all the institutes taking part in the boxing events, and the whole great crowd was in commotion; shouts of enthusiasm, fury, disappointment and approval rose from scores of youthful throats. A number of those little boys, who are the most knowing and ardent fans, darted about in the crowd. Apparently they had not missed a single match, for they knew all the contestants by sight.

"Here comes that one!" shouted a youngster standing next to Vadim, as he jumped up and down to get a better view. "He's always smiling. They keep beating him, and all he does is smile. Hey there, Smiler!"

On every hand could be heard the exclamations and comments of experts.

"Here comes Kostya! He swings a wicked right!"

"Oh, it's all technique with him!"

"Let him have it, Vasya! He's almost out! Come on, Vasya, give him one of your uppercuts! He's done for!"

"The sailor! Here comes the sailor!" shouted the boys when Lagodenko appeared. "He's got a punch all right! You should've seen what he did to that chap yesterday!"

Lagodenko, who was fighting in the middleweight group, won after a stiff fight on points alone. His opponent was a lanky, fair-haired Estonian from Moscow University. After three rounds the fight was called off

and the boxers embraced while the delighted spectators applauded boisterously. Lagodenko, surrounded by his admirers, walked away, looking very glum. In answer to congratulations, he waved his hand and said:

"That's no victory. It's a disgrace!"

"Why, Pyotr?" asked Raya, in mock innocence. "I think it was a splendid victory. Neither of you got hurt."

The boxing contests were not yet over when Vadim left for the volleyball court. Girls' teams were playing already, and many spectators had gathered.

"Where have you been?" asked Vasili Adamovich testily. "Who d'you think you are—a member of the sports commission, or a newspaper correspondent? Go and change at once!"

Vadim changed rapidly, feeling very light and lithe as he ran out on to the court in sports togs. The team was warming up. Rashid was practising passes, another was giving interference, and some were simply jumping up and down in front of the net, their hands extended overhead. They did not look particularly athletic—the long winter had left them white-skinned.

Brazhnev, the P. I. captain, a fourth-year student from the Geography Department, was holding the ball above his head and explaining something or other to one of the players. On seeing Vadim, he dropped the ball and came up to him.

"Hullo, Dima! It's going to be a real game today," he said with an anxious smile.

"Think they'll beat us?"

"They may not, but it's not going to be easy. They say that big fellow Monya, who plays fourth position, has a terrific drive. Gets right through a double block. Mind you keep your eye on him!"

"Are they here?"

"No, but they will be any minute. A terrific drive!" he repeated, with a nervous smile.

Meanwhile, the referees were examining the court and measuring the net. At last the C. I. team arrived. Vadim watched them warming up from the distance. They jumped stiff-legged, throwing the ball in a circle, hitting it with a kind of lazy force. But there was plenty of power behind their hits. Monya, their captain, a young giant over six feet high, with black, curly hair, could apparently serve with either hand.

And now the contesting teams were marching out to the court. They gave their brief courtesy cheer, the referee blew his whistle, the game was on.

The C. I. team won the toss. It was their serve. The ball skimmed lightly over the net and fell straight into the hands of Brazhnev. Brazhnev passed it to Vadim, who sent it up to the net. Rashid's ball, and there he goes for it! Damn it! He forgot to double his fist and the ball was out! Score—1:0.

And the first points are always the hardest to score. . . . The C. I. men were apparently not the least nervous. They remembered that they had beaten the P. I. in the first round. They were perfectly calm. Their serve again—a terrific ball like a cannon shot, with a wicked twist to it. Once more it came to Vadim, who sent it forward. Rashid flew towards it and hit it. The blow sounded deadly, but the ball grazed the net and trickled feebly on to the other side. The C. I. fans cheered like mad, the silly idiots. . . .

"Is there anything wrong with my passing?" whispered Vadim, though he knew very well it was not he who had been to blame.

"Your passing's all right," said Rashid, not looking round.

The C. I.'s had the ball, and the crest of Monya's curly black hair bobbed up over the top of the net. Here it came! Vadim jumped, reaching as high as he could. But the ball did not even touch his finger tips. He turned.

Little Zhenya Toporkov was lying flat on the ground, dazed and blinking.

The ball had sailed right into the midst of the spectators. This was followed by another laugh from the C. I. fans.

"Never mind, boys, never mind!"

Once more Vadim passed the ball, this time just a bit higher. Rashid hit it with a nervous, over-cautious hand. It cleared the net, but there was no drive behind it. That was no ball. What on earth had come over Rashid?

The opposing side easily got the upperhand, by continuously passing the ball to Monya. It whizzed across the net like a gigantic cork flying out of a gigantic bottle.

The score was 3:0. In five minutes it was 6:0. And a minute later, 8 0. The P. I. team was shaken. Rashid was deathly pale, his round face glistening with sweat. But he sweated not from exhaustion so much as from shame. Vadim no longer sent him the ball. Instead he passed to Misha Polyansky, a long-legged, level-headed fellow who scored the first point for the Pedagogical Institute. At last the ball was theirs, and Vadim moved from third to second position. Now he could do the attacking. "Let's have it, let's have it!" he whispered to Rashid. He felt himself grow taut all over with the desire to put his whole strength and weight behind the ball, so that it would scream through the air like a projectile, break through the block, knocking down opponents, one after the other. Playing in second position, Vadim made three points for his team.

But it was too late to win the game now. Vadim's turn to serve came round. Rashid tried playing from second position and made a point or two. But it was all too late.

The referee gave a long blow on his whistle. The first game was lost with a score of 15:6. The teams went out for a brief rest.

Vasili Adamovich was leaning against a post like a grim statue, his eyes fixed on Brazhnev, who slumped along, brushing the dirt off his shorts with elaborate concern. Suddenly the coach's face broke into a smile and he threw his arm about Brazhnev's shoulder, saying gently:

"That's all right, Ilyusha. Take it easy, fellows. You're mad now, so you ought to win."

He slapped the players on their perspiring backs, cracked jokes, gave advice, and they nodded or made monosyllabic replies, feeling hopeless and weary.

Vadim looked into the disappointed faces of his friends—some made no effort to hide their feelings, others forced themselves to be cheery. Spartak tried to prove to Vasili Adamovich that the referee had been wrong about the last ball. He spoke with such vehemence that one might have thought everything hung on that last ball. Poor Spartak, how upset he was!

Among the spectators were Sergei Palavin and Lena. Sergei, who was being held in reserve, was wearing a blue sports shirt like the rest of the players. Fresh and strong, he was smoking and explaining something to Rashid.

"When you take a ball, do this."

The sweating, exhausted, hollow-eyed Rashid nodded without answering, probably without understanding. Lena ran over to Vadim.

"Oh Vadim, here am I cheering you on, and you lost!" she said, pulling a wry face.

"It isn't over yet."

"Please win, Vadim, that's a dear! How I hate that Monya! He stops every ball. And then he laughs."

"He laughs best..." said Alexei, focussing his camera on someone. "Why don't you make eyes at him and lure him to a lemonade stand? Without him they'd be sure to lose."

Suddenly Vadim caught sight of Andrei and Olga. They had not been there earlier in the afternoon, and Vadim had supposed they weren't coming. Pushing her way through the crowd, Olga came up to Vadim and took his hand, which was still trembling from the strain of the game.

"Have you been here long? Did you see us play?" asked Vadim.

"Yes, I did. We'll win," she said quietly. "I have a feeling that we'll win and my feelings are always right."

The referee blew his whistle—the interval was over. Vadim squeezed Olga's fingers harder than he meant to. She gave a little cry, and then laughed at his startled expression.

He ran out with his team to the other side of the court, suddenly feeling a joyous influx of strength. This was the lucky side of the court. They were sure to win here.

Vadim looked at the players facing them. How calm and confident they looked, standing there without moving a muscle. Rashid was shifting from one foot to another, craning his neck, feeling his kneecap, showing in every movement how nervous he was. Zhenya Toporkov, no less uneasy, kept hopping about in his corner, bending almost double as if he had the bellyache, but never taking his eyes off the ball for a second.

Here comes the ball. It flies over the centre of the net, almost touching it, right into the expectant hands of Brazhnev. A fierce fight begins. First one side, then the other, captures the ball, battling to retain it as if it were a matter of life and death. The score quickly reaches 5:5.

Vadim was now playing a rear position. He no longer saw the spectators, or heard their cries, although the fans on both sides were shouting wildly. Nor did he think of

Olga. His eyes were glued to the ball, to that dark whirling globe volleying through space at dizzying speed. He must not miss it, he must catch it in relaxed fingers and subordinate its wild force to his will, turning it into an ally instead of a foe. Something must have happened to Rashid. He hit the ball from any position, giving it tricky turns to fool his opponents, and each of his brilliant manoeuvres was greeted by a roar of approbation from the freshmen, who seemed to have come out in full force.

"Rashid! Ra-a-shid!" they shouted.

The C. I. team was leading consistently, but the P. I.'s were following at their heels. The difference was never more than one point.

"14:13!" announced the referee.

Monya serving. This might be the end—the second game won by the C. I.'s. There was a sudden lull. Vadim chanced to catch a glimpse of Spartak's face. His lips were twitching. "Dear old boy!" thought Vadim affectionately.

Suddenly, in that tense, decisive second, Vadim was filled with a strange calmness and the conviction that victory would be theirs. Rashid had the ball. He passed it to Misha, who was standing in fourth position. Misha leaped up as if on springs and—

"Misha-a-a-a!"

The ball went over and was returned like a streak of dark lightning. Brazhnev reached for it, but only touched it with the tips of his fingers, sending it out of bounds.

"Ah-h-h-h!" gasped the spectators.

But Zhenya Toporkov made an acrobatic leap off the court and dived under the descending ball, sending it rocketing into the air. His feat was rewarded by a loud burst of cheering as all eyes followed the graceful parabola described against the evening sky. The ball landed on the other side of the net rather unexpectedly and the

C. I. players only stood and gaped, nobody even attempting to save it.

Vadim rushed up to the net.

"More speed, more speed, boys!" whispered Brazhnev.

Speed—that was it! Win they must, at any cost. They needed three more points to win. And Vadim scored two. Soon after, the referee raised his hand, the spectators began shouting and whistling but the players could not understand what had happened.

"A double hit!"

Somebody on the other side had hit the ball twice.

The referee gave a long blow on his whistle. The game was won. Now they could have a real rest.

"They won by a miracle," remarked one of the spectators.

"By a fluke, you mean," observed another dryly.

Vadim noticed Krylov standing next to Spartak.

"How are things going, fellows?" asked Krylov, smiling. "What's the score?"

"1:1, Fyodor Andreyevich."

"1:1? The way you look, I was sure it must be 2:0. That's a tie, isn't it? So you haven't won?"

"Not the set, but we've won a very difficult game, Fyodor Andreyevich," said the coach happily, his eyes shining. "We still have the decisive game to play, and we shall win it."

Vasili Adamovich had decided to make a substitution in the third game. After consulting with Brazhnev and Rashid, he called Palavin. He wanted to use him instead of Rashid, who was utterly spent.

And now Vadim and Sergei were standing side by side at the net, as they had so often stood in the past. Sergei had donned the black net he always wore over his unruly hair when playing, and this changed his appearance in some subtle way, making him look older and graver.

The game was on.

Vadim kept his eyes on the ball, which came flying from somewhere over his left shoulder and landed in a far corner of the opposite court. The C. I.'s, too, had made a substitution. In third position, opposite Vadim, stood a short, red-headed youth with a freckled face. There he was, ready to receive the ball, crouching slightly, his leg muscles trembling. He passed it to Monya, who leaped so high that his hairy chest showed above the top of the net.

"Don't block it," whispered Brazhnev. "It won't be a fast one."

Over it came. Vadim heard a gasp behind him. He turned to see Brazhnev on his haunches, his hands still over his head. He had sent the ball out of bounds. Again they had got off to a bad start. The other side's serve. In the tense, set faces opposite him he read the decision to take their revenge at all costs.

Vadim received the ball. He well knew how to pass it to Sergei—just off-centre. If only Sergei proved not to have lost his powerful drive! Sergei ran forward, leaped into the air, gaining height with an energetic scissoring movement of his legs, while turning and pounding the ball hard into the opponent's left corner. No one but Sergei could hit like that. The ball nearly knocked down the player who caught it, and died in his hands.

The game grew ever more swift and exciting. C. I. scored the first point, but Sergei followed up with two. The teams took turns leading. The spectators went mad, shouting in a continuous succession of yells. They crowded about the court, swerving away whenever the playing reached bounds. Vasili Adamovich kept shouting hoarsely and irately:

"Get back there, I tell you!"

Both teams were becoming nervous. Fouls increased, and the referee kept blowing his whistle.

Now the score was 11:8 in favour of C. I. It seemed to Vadim that the game had been going on for years. He ran up to the net, taking fourth position. Damn it all—to feel such furious strength in your arms and have to hold it back! Relax your fingers. Make them softer than wax. Here was his chance at last! Misha sent the ball to the very net. Vadim jumped and suddenly saw four palms on the other side of the net in a double block. In an instant his hand was softer than wax and he gave the ball an easy little push that sent it down just over the block. The point was theirs. The P. I. supporters went wild with joy. But again his hand was gorged with this strength that had not found release, damn it all!

Sergei moved up to fourth position and whispered to Vadim:

“Send it easy.”

Vadim did so. Sergei jumped and hit the ball, emitting a low gasp. Another point.

11:10.

“Sergei!” shouted the audience “Show them, Sergei!”

“Another easy one,” whispered Sergei.

Another such hit was blocked this time. Another hit—again blocked. And another, a gentle one with his fist, to the left. A point!

12 11. The referee’s voice could scarcely be heard

13. . . .

Vadim thought of one thing only—to make his pass short and exact, closer to the centre. For a split second Vadim glimpsed at Sergei’s face—flaming, ecstatic, with his mouth half open.

The C. I.’s were getting panicky

“Watch that fellow!” Monya shouted to someone frenziedly.

Three of their players suddenly jumped in front of Sergei, but he was high above the net and unexpectedly

struck the ball with his left hand. For an instant Vadim saw the rapturous face of Spartak.

"Sergei!" he shouted, waving his hand. "Sergei, old chap! Sergei!"

14:11.

The last point remained to be scored. Again the C.I.'s tried to stop Sergei. They did not spare themselves in the effort to save the ball, and they managed to get it to Monya, playing in second position. Monya struck it into a block, so that the ball came back and hit him on the head. One of the C. I. players fell against Monya as he futilely tried to lift the falling ball. Someone else threw himself under it, but it was too late. Too late. The ball had hit the ground.

The referee gave three long whistles.

The spectators rushed on to the court to wring the hands of Sergei, Vadim, Brazhnev, and anyone else they happened to come across. The referee announced the victory of the P. I. team. Again the brief courtesy cheer, the players walked off

Only now that everything was over did Vadim realize how many people had been at the match. And only now was he conscious of the exhaustion that made him long to sit down, or rather lie down, right there on the ground. His vision was blurred with perspiration.

Olga came over to him, and he rubbed his eyes to get a better look at her.

"I told you we'd win," she said serenely, a twinkle in her blue eyes. "You're soaking wet. Here—"

And she took a handkerchief out of her pocket and began to mop his brow. It took her some time, for the handkerchief was too tiny and feminine to be effective.

"Dima! Where are you?"

Alexei came running over and grabbed him by the arm.

"Don't dare to make him look presentable, young lady!" he shouted. "Are you crazy? That's just how we want to catch him—still showing the ravages of the struggle. Do you think it was easy to win the championship?"

Waves lapped the granite embankment, chilling the air. It was April, and while the days were hot, the evenings were cool.

Lagodenko, Raya, and Nina Fokina were sitting on a bench on the embankment, gazing into the black water, spangled with the reflections of the stars and the lights from the tall houses on the opposite bank. They were speaking in low voices about volleyball, the coming exams, and the summer holidays.

A soft murmur came from the park behind them, and every now and then the breeze would bring them fragments of music from the dance hall. Down the river came a boat, invisible in the darkness; the boatman was plying his oars lazily—splash, then the gurgling of the water; splash and gurgle.

Lagodenko laughed at some *réminiscence*.

"What are you thinking of, Pyotr?"

"Those games this evening. Funny what the sports fever will do to you! I made a point of watching the spectators during that last game. It was marvellous! Sergei was their idol for those fifteen minutes. All was forgotten and forgiven, they were ready to worship him."

"Yes," smiled Raya, "even our stern Spartak looked at him with adoration. Did you hear how he shouted to him?"

"Do you think *you* didn't? I heard you cry: 'Oh Sergei, you're wonderful! You're wonderful!'"

"Well, he is when it comes to volleyball," said Nina. "But unfortunately—or rather, fortunately—life doesn't consist only of volleyball!"

“True,” nodded Lagodenko.

“And it remains to be seen how he’ll get on now.”

“It all depends on himself,” said Raya.

“Chiefly, but not entirely. We must help him. Last night we had a long discussion about him in the hostel. Alexei said Sergei has already changed, but I don’t believe it. One of the other fellows swore he hadn’t changed a bit—had simply adapted himself to the new circumstances.”

“That’s not true. He *has* changed,” said Raya. “But only outwardly, so far. He feels uncomfortable, like a whipped pup, and that’s why he holds himself aloof and doesn’t talk to anyone. It’s so unlike him that it makes you think he’s undergone a great change. As a matter of fact the change isn’t, and couldn’t be, very great as yet. That takes a long time, doesn’t it, Pyotr?”

“It does,” said Lagodenko, slipping an arm about Raya’s shoulder in frank admiration of her sound judgment. “It takes a long time. But the most important thing is that he has come to see things in the right light and has returned to the Institute; it wasn’t easy for a person as proud as Sergei to do that. Nobody can understand that better than me. Well—” Lagodenko yawned luxuriously. “Time will show. Everybody’s eyes’ll be on him now.”

Hurried steps could be heard approaching the bench.

“Oh, here you are!” said Andrei. “Where are the rest?”

“Gone off to enjoy themselves in the park,” said Lagodenko. “They’re still young. Raya and I are the only staid married ones, and that’s why we’re sitting here resting our old bones. Nina’s just keeping us company out of pity.”

“Who are you looking for?” asked Nina.

“For my sister. I’ve been looking for her for an hour—been all over the park, damn it!” Andrei broke off with

an annoyed gesture. "It's time to catch the bus, and she's nowhere to be found. Where could she have gone all by herself?"

"Why all by herself? She's most likely with Dima," said Lagodenko. "Perhaps they've gone to the Neskuchny Gardens."

"With Vadim? What makes you think so? Did you see them together?"

"How dense you are, Andrei!" laughed Nina. "Of course your sister's with Vadim. So there's nothing to worry about."

"Really?" said Andrei in amazement, and then, after a minute's consideration: "Then perhaps I'd better—that is, they may be dancing. I'll go and see."

And he hurried away.

Lagodenko lifted his shoulders incredulously and burst out laughing.

"What a queer bird he is! He looked completely mystified." He shook his head, and added with conviction, "The queerest bird I ever saw."

Chapter 30

Vadim was waked up in the night by a prolonged menacing rumble—tanks! His accustomed ear enabled him to make out, by their jerky snortings at turnings, that they were "34's." Those familiar sounds—the clang of caterpillar treads, the roar of motors, and the hum rising from vibrating roads—took him back to 1944, when they were travelling along Hungarian highways on the march from Debrecen to Komarno. But the tanks that were now passing were peaceful tanks. They were going to the parade.

Vadim fell asleep again in joyous expectation of the morning.

In a few minutes he was awakened by the strains of a song, full of the buoyancy of spring, a song long familiar, yet ever-new:

*The sun was painting tenderly
The ancient Kremlin walls.*

The clear, blue, cloudless sky, shot with pearly mist at the horizon, promised a warm day. Vera Fadeyevna had already left—she was marching with the Lenin District, which was always in the van of the demonstration. Vadim put on light clothes and went out without his cap.

There was a kind of solemn, cool quiet in Kaluzhskaya Street. The sun was still low, and the whole street was in shadow. A white-aproned street cleaner was conscientiously sweeping imaginary dirt from the pavement. The street was scrupulously clean, and there was not a speck of dirt anywhere. There were only a few people out at this early hour, and they were all going the same way, toward the centre of town, hastening to their respective places of assembly. Vadim went in the same direction, overtaking the others and trying to walk in time to the song borne on the air by a distant loud-speaker:

Good-day to you, beloved city!

From Kaluzhskaya Square all cars turned into side streets. There was no traffic on the principal streets. Vadim had difficulty in getting on to the Krimsky Bridge through the briskly marching columns of demonstrators. It was crowded, noisy, and hot on the bridge. The streets presented a spectacle only to be seen on holidays: people walking in the middle of the road, along the tram lines, and the motor cars nosing cautiously among them.

The courtyard in front of the Institute was full to overflowing. Students were crowding outside at the gates and on the square. Hearing the strains of an accordion, Vadim walked in the direction of the sounds—it was sure to be Alexei playing, and where Alexei was, all the rest would be found.

“Aha! The right flank!” cried Gortsev, extending his long arm and catching hold of Vadim’s shoulder over several heads. “Come on, you can help take out the portraits. They’re in the cloakroom.”

Vadim had no time to exchange greetings with anyone, for Gortsev dragged him straight into the building. They shoved their way through the crowds of students in the yard; hands clapped Vadim on the shoulder, voices cried out to him, happy excited shouts and laughter rang out everywhere, and he moved on through the riot of colour and sound.

And then came a distant booming of cannons in the Kremlin. The military parade had begun.

Vadim took up his place on the right flank of the column. Beside him were Andrei in a white Russian blouse, with embroidery on the standing-up collar and side fastenings, and Max, who in honour of the day had exchanged his ski jacket for an open-necked shirt of rainbow hues. Everyone was still standing about in confused ranks. Alexei and his accordion were surrounded by students singing humorous songs. Over all, of course, soared the “lyrical soprano” of Lena Medovskaya.

*When our earth was destitute,
The Lord, He made the Institute.*

Lena wore a light-blue silk blouse; her face was rosy, and her ash-blonde hair, brushed up at the back, and exposing the white nape of her neck, gleamed in the sunlight like gold. Vadim admired her from the distance,

indeed everyone was looking at her and smiling. She had already three times informed all and sundry that her daddy had offered her a pass to the Red Square, but that she had refused it, preferring to go in the demonstration with everyone. Sergei Palavin stood next to her, singing too, but so softly that he was almost inaudible. Sergei had been back at the Institute a fortnight now, but was as taciturn and watchful as he had been the first day. If he did speak to anyone it was only about Institute affairs.

Sergei had always marched on the right flank in demonstrations and always in the first ranks, once at the very head of the column, bearing the Institute's emblem. Now he was one of the rank and file, lost in the third-year crowd, in his hands a red flower on the end of a bamboo stick.

Suddenly banners began fluttering up in front, posters were brought into the vertical, portraits of leaders held high—the front columns had begun to move. Spartak came running too, a check cap on his head with the peak worn back-to-front, beads of sweat standing out on his forehead.

"Find your places, everyone, fall in.... Forward march!" he shouted cheerfully.

As they marched, Andrei told Vadim that Olga had been offered work in Moscow—at the Botanical Gardens. She would take her final examinations at the end of May, and start working in June. Both her father and her brother were pleased about this. She was very young still to be on her own. The best thing would be for her to work in Moscow for a time, till she could get into an institute.

"And is Olga pleased?" asked Vadim.

"Olga? I can't make her out. She was always dreaming of getting down to work, and as far away as possible. We kept on telling her that she ought to stay in Moscow, so as to get into an institute—she wanted to go to the Forestry Institute—but it was no good. 'There's

plenty of time—I've got my whole life before me. I must do some work first.' And suddenly, the last few days, she seems to have given in. . . ."

"But it will be wonderful for her to work in the Botanical Gardens!" said Vadim with sudden warmth. "She ought to take it! What could be more interesting?"

"She hasn't quite made up her mind. She says there's someone she must consult." Andrei paused, squinting at Vadim. He obviously knew who it was that Olga wanted to consult. Vadim thought he knew, too. They went on for some time in silence. Vadim lit a cigarette and Andrei removed his glasses, pretending to be very busy wiping them clean.

Then he took hold of Vadim's elbow.

"She's coming to the party at the Institute. You might . . . you know . . . tell her not to play the fool. She's offered a good place—let her take it."

Vadim nodded. Yes, he would tell her. She wouldn't leave Moscow so long as he was there. They had got to be together, to live in the same town. He felt a rush of joy—he had thought so much about this lately, and had been unable to come to any conclusion, and now everything was settling itself so simply and unexpectedly! She wasn't going away. She would stay in the same town with him. She had made up her mind to stay because . . .

The day was turning warmer and warmer, the sky getting bluer, the ocean of humanity swelling and tossing between its shores of stone, crowned by the red foam of banners. The sun was casting its burning rays on the panes of the wide-open windows, on the crimson silk and gold of the flags, on the bronzed and silvered staffs.

At the corner of Sadovaya Street, where the Institute's column halted for a time, appeared the first military columns, which had just been through the Red Square.

Sailors marched by with light, springy steps. In the first ranks went the boatswains, giants to a man, with weather-beaten bronzed faces and powerful shoulders. They blazed with Orders and Medals, their cuffs heavy with gold braid, their boatswains' whistles slung on chains across their chests.

Brand-new green lorries swept by, bearing motorized infantry, anti-aircraft guns and searchlights—the powerful Soviet lorries of the latest make, a bear on the radiators of the ones from the Yaroslavl works, a bison on those from Minsk. The young soldiers in their olive-green helmets sat in the lorries, their sub-machine guns between their knees, nodding and smiling at the demonstrators. Next, shaking the ground beneath them, came the tanks. The commander of each tank stood in the open hatch. The street was full of the thunder of steel, the grinding of caterpillar treads, the smell of exhaust gases and heated armour plating. The cries surging from the throats of thousands exulting in their army, were drowned in the powerful din.

Vadim caught sight of little Li Bon's beaming face, the mouth half open in wonder, the eyes gleaming. Then his glance fell on some ecstatic-looking Albanians, raising tightly-clenched brown fists and shouting something which was lost in the general noise, and was probably incomprehensible anyhow, being in Albanian.

The nearer they got to the heart of the town the slower the column moved. At Arbat Street they had to make another halt. They drew up alongside a huge column of young people, like themselves from some institute, or perhaps from the University. Songs could be heard on every hand; people were singing in all sorts of languages, singing to music and singing unaccompanied. A few short, black-haired students were loudly chanting a song which sounded strangely familiar, though Vadim could not make out the words. Why, of course! They were Span-

iards singing their *Bandera Roja*. The Russian boys and girls began humming it—nobody knew the words, but the tune was familiar to all. The Albanians immediately joined in the singing. Alexei came up to them with his accordion, and began picking out the melody.

And suddenly the glorious song of the Spanish Communists, known the world over, was taken up by scores of voices and rang out over the square...

"The youth song, kids!" shouted Spartak from afar, waving back his check cap. "Alexei—the youth song!"

Without waiting for the music, Lena's light, ringing voice floated out:

*One great vision unites us,
Though remote be the lands of our birth,*

And the chorus echoed, still not quite in unison:

*Foes may threaten to smite us;
We shall fight to bring peace to the earth.*

And now a band took up the song, the brass voices of the bugles guiding its spontaneous flow. The nearby column moved on, but the song did not die. Rank after rank passed by, girls and boys, arm in arm, light-haired, dark-haired, fair-complexioned, swarthy, bronze-faced, high-cheekboned, round-faced, the children of many peoples.

*We are the youth,
And the world acclaims our song of truth.*

Vadim could not hear himself singing. He looked at the faces of the singers, the faces of so many people, so different from one another, but all gilded by the rosy, sunlit colour of the banners, and lit up by the spring day.

All of a sudden he understood with extraordinary clarity, with his whole being, the truth of the words repeated the world over "Peace will triumph over war!" There was no power on earth which could take from the people what they had won—the joy of an honest and happy existence.

From a neighbouring column someone called out:
"Vadim Petrovich!"

It was a curly-headed youth from the factory—Igor Sotnikov. Vadim immediately noticed several more acquaintances among the young plant workers, and nodded to them from the distance. Igor ran over, joyfully greeting Vadim and Andrei. In his left hand he held a small red flag bearing the date, "1952"

"How's everything, Igor?" asked Vadim, smiling.
"What's the meaning of your flag?"

"It was given to those of us who are working on the 1952 assignment," said Igor carelessly, but his eyes shone with frank pride

"Vadim Petrovich, will the circle go on?" he continued briskly "Or have you got your exams just now?"

"We'll meet a few more times before the exams begin."

They went on a few paces side by side, but the factory column was advancing rapidly, and Igor, with a word of farewell, ran to catch up with it. Turning as he ran, he suddenly shouted gaily:

"Vadim Petrovich, that time-machine —it's ours!"

And he waved his flag over his head.

The columns were pouring thousands-strong into the Red Square. From Gorky Street, from Sverdlov Square and from Manège Square, a stream of humanity poured into the Red Square, breaking against the rock of the Historical Museum into two streams. Before he could see the Mausoleum, Vadim heard the crescendo of "hurrahs." Now he was walking beside the crowded white granite

tribunes, and was nearing the Mausoleum with its polished granite facets.... People started walking quicker, tiptoeing so as to see better, children jumping up to look at Stalin. The grownups lifted the children to their shoulders. An excited child's voice cried out: "Dad! There's Stalin! I can see him!"

"Greetings to Soviet students!" floated over the square, growing in volume to a roar.

Vadim could see Stalin.

There he stood, on the Mausoleum, among his comrades. Vadim saw Stalin raise his hand to the peak of his cap, pull it slightly over the eyes, to shade them from the sun, and then the familiar calm gesture of greeting....

Ilya Brazhnev, who was walking in front of Vadim, turned round and shouted:

"On the Seventh of November!..." but leaving the sentence unfinished, he turned his eyes to the Mausoleum once more and waved his hand high above his head.

Vadim would have liked to stop, to have a good look at the beloved leader, but the people behind him were in a hurry to see Stalin too, and when Vadim slowed down involuntarily, somebody, probably Alexei, gave him a push from behind.

"Glory to Stalin!" came from thousands of throats.

Fervently and with enormous force, as it seemed to him, Vadim shouted out together with the rest these words of love. He lost sight of Stalin for a moment, because of the warm moist film which covered his eyes.

"In nineteen-forty-one!..." Brazhnev shouted again, half-turning towards Vadim, his eyes still on the Mausoleum. But once more he could not finish the sentence.

Only when they reached the Spassky Gate did Enev at last bring out the rest of the sentence:

"On the 7th of November, 1941, Stalin saw me off from here—to the front!" he said in a loud excited voice. "I took part in the military parade then. I was a sub-machine gunner. . . . And now, when I'm graduating and going away to work, Stalin is seeing me off again! Do you realize, Vadim—he's seeing me off to my life of peaceful labour!"

And Vadim thought how in a year's time Stalin would be seeing him, Vadim Belov, off to his life of joyous toil, him, and Spartak, and Pyotr Lagodenko, Andrei, Sergei, and how many more unknown friends who had come to Moscow from different parts of the country, from other countries, who had come here to become useful members of society, to be able to help their people, and to love this enormous beautiful town still more fervently. They would all find it hard to part with Moscow. But to love Moscow means to love one's country, and to love one's country means to love the great cause for which the Soviet country stands, works, fights and conquers. . . .

Walking down from the square, Vadim found himself at Chugunny Bridge. From here he could see the whole of the Kremlin Embankment, covered with the animated multicoloured crowd of demonstrators, and the Moscow River gleaming in the noon sun. A white ship, decorated with flags, was slowly sailing upstream, a band playing on the top deck, and people standing at the rails, waving their handkerchiefs. And far on the horizon he could see the Kamenny Bridge—a blue silhouette against the sun, and beyond the bridge, melting into the bright haze, he could guess at rather than see the boundless expanse of Moscow. . . .

Vadim met Olga later, at the May Day meeting in the Institute. When the concert was over they went out

together. Moscow was bathed in festive light. The houses looked deserted—everyone in Moscow was out in the streets today.

Hand in hand, Vadim and Olga sauntered slowly among the crowd.

"What a sunny, warm day it's been—like summer!" said Olga, looking up into the starry sky which trembled like a thing alive in the rays of the searchlights. "It makes me feel melancholy, somehow...."

"Why melancholy, Olga?" Vadim asked, surprised.

"I feel I'm bidding farewell to Moscow...."

"What d'you mean farewell?"

"In a month, Vadim, I am to leave for a forest station, in the Stalingrad Region," Olga said after a pause. "I've thought it over, and now I've made up my mind.... Yes, the Stalingrad Region."

She gave a little nod and fell silent. Vadim was silent, too—it was so unexpected!

"And the Botanical Gardens?"

"The Botanical Gardens will stay in Moscow," Olga gravely answered, and then burst into merry, tantalizing laughter, looking up at Vadim. Her blue eyes seemed almost transparent, shining with the reflections of the lights. "Am I right, Vadim?" she asked, suddenly growing serious again.

"You are," said Vadim, somewhat crestfallen. "Of course, but ... Andrei said you had agreed to...."

"Yes, I did think of it for a time.... I don't like to leave Moscow. But, Vadim, you've got to understand..." she sighed, and then went on in an exaggeratedly cheerful voice: "I shan't find the real, practical work I long for here. And I'm too young to go in for research work, aren't I? And then these shelter belt stations are the most important sector of the forest planting front. And I want to be in the front-lines. And then I want to lead a tough, independent life."

"And then what?"

"After doing some practical work I'll come back to Moscow and go to the Timiryazev Academy."

"I see," Vadim muttered hollowly. "Just when I'll have graduated and left for Sakhalin."

"Oh, so you mean to go away too?"

"Yes, but it won't be forever, either, I shall come back."

"I see," said Olga, echoing Vadim's tone. "Just when I'll have graduated from the Academy and left for Kamchatka."

"And so we'll never meet," said Vadim, smiling ruefully.

Although they were walking in a dense and noisy crowd they did not notice anyone round them. They were on the embankment by now, and stopped by the granite parapet. There were fewer people here, and they weren't so noisy, mostly strolling couples. A launch with garlands of red, yellow and green lamps was floating down the river, the first tentative chord of an accordion and the sound of a woman's laugh were carried over the water. And in the sky, high above the festive town, an invisible airplane was flying—a little red light busily making its way among the stars.

"Oh yes, we will," Olga said quietly. "And if we don't well, then it means there was nothing in it."

Vadim smiled as he gazed into her eyes raised to his with timid expectation.

"Are you happy for me, Vadim?" she asked, her voice still lower.

Of course he was! For her sake, and for his own, too—for not having been deceived in her. He went on saying that he would go to the Southern Urals in the summer with a folklore expedition, and on the way back he'd go and see her at her station.

"It's really so near the Stalingrad Region—the Southern Urals. You only have to cross the Volga...."

But he did not have time to complete his sentence. Right over their heads the flares burst, lighting up the embankment with an orange glow. For a long, long time they stood in silence, watching the fountains of multi-coloured lights go up into the sky, and come down to the ground, or fall into the river with a sizzling sound. Everything turned pink and blue and gold, and for a moment it was light as day....